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BRAVE AND BOLD

A DIFFERENT COMPLETE STORY EVERY WEEK

No 29

ROBERT BRENDAN;
BELL-BOY
or. Under the Hypnotic Spell



"Can you hold on a minute longer?" he shouted to Robert. "I'll try," responded the brave hero, making an effort to speak loudly.

BRAVE & BOLD

A Different Complete Story Every Week

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1903, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C. STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 29.

NEW YORK, July 11, 1903.

Price Five Cents.

ROBERT BRENDAN, BELLBOY;

OR,

Under the Hypnotic Spell.

By JOHN DE MORGAN.

CHAPTER I.

ROBERT, THE BELL-BOY.

The sun was just commencing to send its rays over the mountain tops and to smile on the grateful earth when what had appeared to be a bundle of old clothes showed signs of animation, and developed into a good-looking, well-formed boy.

It was apparent that the green grass had been his bed during the night, and that he had slept as refreshingly as any one could, even in a richly-upholstered chamber:

He stood upright, stretched his arms, shook himself and, strange to say, sighed.

Seeing a mountain stream flowing near, after making sure that he was absolutely alone, he undressed and jumped into the little creek.

The water was so clear that he thought it could be but a couple of feet deep; great therefore was his astonishment when he found he was out of his depth.

He was not alarmed, but pleased, for he loved the water and could swim like a fish.

There is a fascination about bathing in a placid river, or the grander and wilder ocean, which can never be understood by those who have no experienced it.

Robert Brendan forgot his troubles, forgot his hunger, and laughed merrily as he splashed about in the water.

When he felt that he had enjoyed the fascination long enough, he left the water and ran up and down the field, having the rare pleasure of a pure sun bath.

When he began to put on his coarse clothes his happiness somewhat subsided, and his troubles again passed in panoramic order before his mind.

He was hungry.

Not that temporary hunger which many of our readers have experienced after a long walk or a fatiguing game.

Robert Brendan had tasted nothing for two days save some wild berries, which he had eaten, not caring whether they were poisonous or not; in fact, almost wishing that they would painlessly put an end to his existence.

Two days without food, and the two days preceding those with scarcely enough food for one meal.

He sat down on a stone, alone with his misery, and began to think.

A scrap of paper was blown across the creek and had fallen at his feet.

Almost unwittingly he picked it up and began to read:

"If so quickly I am done for,
I wonder what I was begun for?"

He read the distich over several times.

"That's so. I've thought that way myself several times. Some one else has had the same idea."

He read the lines again.

"Am I done for?" he asked himself; and, as no one was near to answer his question, he replied to it himself.

"I don't think so."

He stood up, stretched himself again, struck his chest with his fist almost dramatically, and ejaculated:

"No, Robert Brendan, you are not done for yet. But you are mighty hungry."

He started off along the road, new energy lending spirit to his feet, and a new determination to fight the battle of life to the end. He had not gone far when he met an old, benevolent man on horseback. Robert was in the middle of the road, and the horseman shouted to him to move on one side.

The boy, lost in thought, started as he heard the voice, and was still more startled when the horseman exclaimed:

"Boy, you look healthy. I'd give all I possess to have as ruddy a glow on my face."

"Would you, sir?"

"Ay; sell me your secret of health and make the price high, for it shall be paid. What do you eat to make you look so healthy?"

"Anything, sir, I can find."

"Ha, ha! that is good. Now tell me, what did you have for breakfast?"

"Nothing."

"Ha, ha! A constitutional before breakfast. Tell me on what you dined yesterday."

"Nothing, sir."

"Nothing! Don't mock me——"

"I am not. Believe me, sir, I have eaten nothing but some wild berries for two days."

"Heaven bless us! Is that the truth?"

"As the sun shines above me, sir, it is!"

"What is your name?"

"Robert Brendan."

The horseman had dismounted and stood by the boy's side.

"Is your father living?"

"I have no father."

"Your mother?"

"I never knew my mother."

"Your relatives brought you up, then?"

"No, sir; I have no relatives."

There was truthfulness stamped on the boy's face, and his manner was too earnest to admit of doubt.

"You have told me your name, and it is right you should know mine; I am Thomas Graham, and I am living at present at the Glenada Hotel. Tell me where you are living?"

"I have no home. Oh, sir, you will not betray me——"

"What have you done?"

"You won't let them put me in prison?"

"In prison? Who? What for?"

"I ran away."

"From school?"

"No, sir; I will tell you all if you will save me from them."

"My boy, you are safe with me, though if you have broken any law I should be powerless to save you from punishment."

"Is it wrong to run away?"

"That depends on circumstances. Tell me your history; I may be able to assist you."

"If you could! I would work so hard—it is all I want. I never wanted to tell any one my story."

"Never mind, then; I will believe in you."

"Will you?"

"Yes. Can you read and write?"

"Yes, sir; I went to a public school and graduated."

"How old are you?"

"Fourteen."

"Did you run away from school?"

"No, sir."

Thomas Graham had been leading the horse and walking by Robert's side on the way to the hotel.

There was something in the boy which attracted his attention and made him feel deeply interested in him.

Entering the office, he spoke to the clerk, and soon Robert was engaged in the delightful work of eating a good breakfast.

When he had finished—and he did finish, though the waiter who attended to his wants began to think that the boy's capacity for stowing away food was greater than he had any idea of—he was taken upstairs to Mr. Graham's room.

"Do you feel better?"

"Yes, sir. I feel so happy I could dance."

"Never mind the dance now. Where are you going?"

"Nowhere, sir," answered Robert, looking amazed at such a question, seeing that he was standing perfectly still.

"I mean to what friends are you going?"

"I have no friends—no, sir, not one in the wide world."

"But you never ran away without having some idea of what you would do."

"I thought I might get work here, sir, and then, at the end of the season, I might have enough money to take me to New York."

"Ring that bell for me."

Robert pressed the button, and very soon afterward a bell-boy appeared and received a message.

For fully ten minutes Mr. Graham and Robert occupied the room, but neither spoke a word.

A knock on the door told of the return of the bell-boy. He brought a sealed envelope.

"Robert, if you like to accept the position, the hotel keeper tells me he will give you a trial as bell-boy. It all depends on yourself whether you keep the position or not."

"How can I thank you, sir?"

"By doing your duty and winning the respect of your employers."

"I—I——"

"Do not try to thank me; go down to the office and give this card to the clerk. Your duties will begin at once."

At sunrise Robert Brendan was hungry and unhappy, almost wishing for death. He was without a friend in the world.

At noon he had partaken of a good breakfast, was dressed in a dark-green uniform with innumerable gilt buttons on vest and jacket, and believed he had more friends than any other boy of his age.

Such was the influence of a good meal after a long period of hunger.

CHAPTER II.

THE MYSTERY OF NUMBER THIRTEEN.

The Glenada Hotel was one of the most fashionable summer resorts on the Atlantic Coast.

It was no use for a man of moderate means to choose the Glenada as the place wherein to spend his summer vacation, for he would have to mortgage his year's income to pay his bill.

It was essentially the rich man's pleasure resort.

Robert Brendan rubbed his eyes many times that first day to make sure he was really awake, for he believed he had reached fairy-land at last.

In the surf a hundred people were bathing.

Their united wealth would have been great enough to purchase many an Eastern kingdom.

There were old ladies and young girls, aged men and dandish youths.

The ladies' costumes, even in the water, were superb, and Robert never thought such beauty could exist until he gazed upon it. He was standing in the office, looking out on the multi-colored scene, when a sweet voice addressed him.

"Boy, come with me."

He turned and saw the most exquisitely beautiful girl his eyes had ever beheld.

There was a fascination in her look which almost took away his breath.

She was attired for her surf bath, and over her bathing costume she wore a long cloak of some delicate texture, as fine as a spider's web, and of the most delicate green color.

Robert followed her down the steps, wondering what his duty would be.

"What is your name?"

"Rob-ert," he stammered.

"I shall call you Rob. You are a new boy?"

"Yes, miss."

"When did you come?"

"This morning."

"Is your home near here?"

"No, miss."

"Where is it?"

"I have no home."

"Oh, orphan; how did you secure a position at the Glenada?"

"Through Mr. Graham."

"Ah! You have a good friend. He is very wealthy, did you know?"

"No, miss."

"Rob, you must hold my wrap while I am in the water. Stay right here until I return to you."

"Yes, miss."

"Rob?"

He followed her still nearer the water.

"Do not let my wrap get soiled; a stain would ruin it."

"I will be careful."

"Nice boy that," she murmured to herself as she walked into the water.

"Isn't she beautiful?" Robert asked his inner consciousness.

Her costume was peculiar, but very becoming. Its color was mainly that light-green which pervades among the marine weeds.

So nearly allied was it to the color of the waves that it assimilated with them, and had it not been for the darker trimming and her bare neck and face, framed with the richness of long auburn hair, she would not have been seen in the water.

"Hello, boy! Are you with her?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who is she?"

"I don't know, sir. She is staying at the hotel."

"Of course. Don't I know that? But what is her name?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Is there any name on the cloak?"

"That I cannot answer."

"Allow me to see it."

"No, sir."

"What?"

"I cannot allow any one to touch the wrap; it was placed in my care."

"I will give you a dollar to let me examine it."

"Not for a hundred, sir, unless the lady gives permission."

"I'll report you. You are insolent."

The man walked away, and Robert was filled with wonder, for his interrogator was a guest at the hotel, and could therefore find out the name of the beautiful girl.

Presently he returned. The beauty was swimming some distance from the shore.

The tall, aristocratic-looking guest apologized for his threat, and told Robert that there was a mystery about the girl.

"She has plenty of money, dresses more richly than any one here, but she has no friends, is entirely alone, and even the hotel register does not contain her name. She occupies the suite of rooms at the top of the grand stairway. Find out her name and bring it to me at No. 27, and I will give you five dollars."

"Why not ask the clerk?"

"That I cannot do. Find out, and I will be your friend."

The sea-green belle was leaving the water, and Robert hurried to meet her, and with courtly ease placed the wrap over her shoulders.

His reward was a sweet smile, but a strange look came into her eyes, a glitter which struck terror into Rob's heart, for he thought any one who could look like that would not hesitate to use a dagger if she were offended.

"Come to my room in half an hour."

Although there is plenty to fill up a bell-boy's time at a fashionable hotel, still the half hour seemed very long to Robert Brendan.

There were three other boys, and they knew the house so well that most of the work fell to their share that day.

Robert pressed the electric button at No. 13 exactly as the half hour expired.

"Come."

He opened the door and stood within a richly-furnished parlor.

"Can you keep a secret, Rob?"

"Yes, miss."

"Positive?"

"Yes."

"How much money would tempt you to betray a secret?"

Robert hesitated. He had not a cent in the world just then, and he wondered whether a money temptation would be greater than he could withstand.

As he hesitated, he raised his eyes and saw his interrogator looking intently at him.

"No money would tempt me!" he answered, firmly.

"I believe you."

"Thank you, miss."

"You will have to attend on me very often. You must never divulge anything you see or hear. I do not choose that my name should be known, and the books I read, the company I keep, must never be spoken of. You understand?"

"I do, and promise you I will keep secret everything you wish."

"You had better. I am a good friend, but a very bad one to have as an enemy. Bring me some ice water."

Robert knew that was intended for his dismissal, and when he returned with the pitcher of water he was not surprised to be told to place it outside the door.

"Miss Speranza, New Orleans," was the name on the register, but every one knew that Speranza was an assumed name.

She had only arrived the day before, and at once had captured every stray masculine heart.

"Who is she?"

Every one asked the question, but no one could answer it.

"She is wealthy."

That was the clerk's whisper to an inquisitive guest.

"Really?"

"Yes; she placed a thousand dollars in my hands and told me I was to be her banker while she stayed, as she did not care to open a new banking account."

On the promenade Robert overheard a number of opinions as to her identity.

"European countess."

"Not so, or she wouldn't travel incog."

"What then?"

"A princess."

"Or adventuress."

The unlucky promulgator of that opinion was immediately cut by all, for how could one so lovely and with such good taste be an adventuress?

The mystery was unsolved that night, and yet every guest of the Glenada did his best to penetrate through her disguise.

She danced in the ballroom, and bestowed her hand on every one who asked; as a consequence she did not miss one dance the whole evening.

One thing attracted Robert's attention; she wore a blood-red artificial rose in her bosom, the whole day and evening.

She breakfasted in her room, but Robert noticed the rose, and he soon learned that she wore it with every costume, whether tailor made or negligee, and though she changed her dress several times a day, the rose was always conspicuous.

CHAPTER III.

ROBERT'S HISTORY.

A week passed away without any incident out of the ordinary.

Robert Brendan was making himself popular, and that meant a great deal at such a place as the Glenada.

His "tips" had during the week amounted to five dollars, and that notwithstanding the jealousy of the other boys, who often answered his bells and thus forced him into the background.

Miss Speranza was as fascinating as ever, and the guests were all enthralled by her witchery of manner.

The men were ready to swear by her, and the women were not envious, though she was the best dressed of all the guests and possessed the greatest number of precious stones.

Perhaps the real reason why envy did not fill the female heart was the universal belief that Speranza was a princess in her own right, and therefore, according to the logic of their inferior "gray matter," a superior being.

Robert was still her favorite, and at times she obtained permission for him to attend solely to her for an entire afternoon, the hotel proprietor not caring to deny anything to his wealthy guest.

Although Speranza had bound him to secrecy, she could not understand that any one else should desire their affairs kept private.

She continually questioned Rob about the guests, asking him about the ladies' dresses, their favorite jewelry, and lots of things which were likely to catch the observant eye of a sharp bell-boy.

Robert had been nearly two weeks clad in the uniform of the Glenada when, instead of answering the bell of No. 13, he made his way to Room 35, and in a frightened manner told Mr. Graham that all was over.

"What is it, Robert?"

"He is here."

"Who?"

"Tony Espartero."

"And who is that? Who is this Tony? Any one who wants to see me?"

"No, no! Oh, sir, save me from him!"

"What is he to you?"

"May I tell you all? I wish I had done so at first."

"Sit down, Rob. Compose yourself. Stay, I will tell the clerk I need you for an hour."

When Graham returned Rob was still excited, and immediately asked:

"Is he there? Does he want me?"

"No; I told Mr. Wallis—"

"It isn't the clerk, sir, but Tony Espartero."

"I did not see him. This Espartero is an Italian, I suppose?"

"Mexican, sir."

"Sit down"—Robert had risen and was pacing the room—"and tell me why you fear this man."

Robert Brendan did not sit down; he was too excited. He walked about the room nervously.

"I do not know who I am," he commenced. "I was brought up by a man named Brendan, and was sent to a public school. About a year ago Brendan told me that I was no relative of his, that he had been paid for my support, that my father was traveling in foreign countries, but was expected home, and that when he returned I was to go to him."

"I was pleased, for I never liked Brendan. I asked why I was called by his name."

"He laughed and said: 'One name was as good as another,' and added in a low voice that I might one day be glad I was called Brendan."

"I could get no satisfaction, and so continued on at school, doing my level best, so that my father should not be ashamed of me."

"I have wondered why I never asked about my mother, for I do not think I once referred to her."

"Brendan was kinder to me during that last year, and I am very grateful for it."

"At last the day came when I was to see my father, and my heart beat so that I was afraid I might die."

"When I was called into the room I saw Antony Espartero, and Brendan said: 'Robert, behold your father!' I was very disappointed; I cried, not from joy, but sorrow, for I did not like Espartero."

"Not like your father?" exclaimed Mr. Graham.

"He is not my father."

"What makes you say that?"

"I feel it."

"But you were away from him so long."

"Yes; yet my whole nature is cold when he is near."

"Why did you run away from him?"

"He was cruel."

"In what way?"

"He wanted me to join his tribe."

"What?"

"Did I not tell you he was a Mexican gypsy?"

"No; is he?"

"Yes; he is the chief or ruler of all the Mexican gypsies, and he said I was to be their interpreter; that was why I had been sent to an American school."

Mr. Graham had traveled very considerably in Mexico, and he knew that in some parts the so-called gypsies were really brigands who hesitated at nothing.

He wondered whether this man Espartero was really one of these.

Once, years before, when he was quite a young man, he had encountered a band of brigands, and only escaped losing his ears by the payment of a big ransom.

There was a dashing young fellow with the brigands who was selected as their future chief; could it be that he was Tony Espartero?

Robert was looking out of the window, while Mr. Graham was in a reminiscent mood.

"Why did you not go with him?" Mr. Graham asked.

"I was afraid of him. He was harsh and cruel, and I—ran away."

"Why do you think he came here?"

"To look for me. He says that the law would make me go with him. Would it, sir?"

"Not if you could prove he was cruel or criminal."

"What am I to do?"

"Go about your duties, and I will protect you."

"Thank you, sir. I will be all my life grateful to you."

Robert left the room, feeling braver, yet he trembled for fear he might be seen by his reputed father.

CHAPTER IV.

SEÑOR ANTONIO ESPARTERO.

Robert was in the office, and nearly fainted when he saw his father enter, walk straight to the desk, and ask to be shown to a room.

The gypsy chief wrote his name in large script, plainly and without the slightest attempt at a flourish:

"Antonio Espartero, San Diego."

"I have no baggage," he said to the clerk, "but I always pay in advance. Take a day from that," throwing a twenty-dollar bill on the desk.

The clerk gave Espartero the change, and called Robert to show him to a room.

Rob apparently did not hear, for he never turned toward the desk. William, another boy, stepped briskly forward, took the key of No. 93, and led the way to the elevator.

In the afternoon Miss Speranza was strolling along the sands, as she often did, alone.

The guests of the hotel seemed to be all on the sands, and Espartero among them.

He had spoken to quite a number, choosing unobtrusive ways of doing it, so that not even the most exclusive could take offense.

He would point out a peculiarly-shaped fleecy cloud, or direct attention to some porpoises rolling over in the water a distance away.

His manner was pleasing, his appearance fascinating, and soon the guests began to think the newcomer the most delightful man they had ever met.

Men introduced him to their wives, and the ladies were charmed.

Thomas Graham had been one of the first to whom Espartero spoke, and had not Robert made him his confidant, he, too, would have voted him a pleasant companion.

There was a mystery about this Mexican—or, perhaps about the bell-boy—for Graham noticed Espartero looking at Robert several times, but never once speaking to or appearing as though he knew him.

It was evident that the boy was frightened, though, after the first encounter, he grew bolder and waited on Miss Speranza as usual.

He was sent to the house for a book, and as he turned to go he saw Miss Speranza drop her fan, which was instantly picked up and handed to her by Espartero, with the most graceful bows and Southern gallantry.

But Espartero did not stop there; he walked by her side until Robert returned.

Here again was a mystery, for he was the first one of the male

sex who had been seen to interest the lady since she had been at the Glenada.

In the evening Espartero entered the ballroom, and danced with the easy grace of the Mexican gallant.

The band was playing a dreamy waltz when a loud crash called the attention of all to Robert.

He had been sitting, like one entranced, watching the dancing and admiring the dancers.

To him it was a vision of beauty. Never had he seen such wealth of diamonds and rubies as were displayed by the ladies.

The scene was one of glittering grandeur.

The other bell-boys, accustomed to such sights, teased him almost beyond endurance.

They called him "greenie" and "hayseed," but he professed not to care, and because he did not lose his temper they disliked him.

While he was watching the dancers William tied a strong string to the large ice water filter, which was one of the ornaments of the hotel.

It was enameled white, and studded with imitation jewels; while little brackets, shaped like a hand and arm, projected from the filter to hold the crystal tumblers.

The string which William had fastened to the filter had a noose at the other end, which the boy deftly slipped around Robert's foot.

The bell rang, and it was Rob's turn to attend the summons. He jumped up, the noose tightened, and as he stepped forward, down came the filter on the marble floor, breaking every tumbler, and knocking off one of the brackets.

The crash startled the dancers, and all hurried to see what had happened.

It was easily seen that Robert was not responsible for the accident, though the clerk blamed him, and professed to believe William's story that Robert had thrown the string over the filter, and, forgetting it was there, stepped accidentally on the end, and caused the catastrophe.

Espartero danced twice with Miss Speranza, and yet did not appear to be any more intimate with her than with the other ladies.

Robert's room was on the top floor, and opened upon a small balcony constructed for the use of firemen in case of a conflagration, so that they might have a point of vantage near the roof.

That night, when he had been asleep for two hours or so, he was awakened by a noise at the window.

Could it be that the hotel was on fire?

He listened, and the noise sounded as though some one was trying to open his window.

Had he been on the ground floor he would have suspected burglars; but what lover of darkness would climb four stories to enter a house by the roof, when there were so many other ways more available?

He had no fear, but was scarcely awake.

When he aroused himself he opened the window, and at once a man stepped into the room.

"Silence! I have something to say to you."

He recognized the voice of Tony Espartero.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"You thought I should never find you. I tracked you here, and I am glad you ran away."

Robert did not speak: he was trembling violently.

"Stand still; I'm not going to hurt you. Of course you haven't told any one who I am?"

Had Robert been able to speak he would have told the truth, but his tongue seemed swollen, and he could not articulate.

"Of course you haven't; you have more sense. It is as well.

I do not want to be recognized by you. We are strangers publicly, or I should not have risked my life by climbing up the fire-escape. But you are in my power, all the same, and you will have to obey me, whether you like it or not. All I want of you is that you let me know where you go to when you leave here. Do you hear?"

"I hear."

"Will you do it?"

"I do not know."

"I do. You have got to promise or——"

"What?"

"I will kill you."

"Then you will have to die as well," retorted Robert, suddenly gaining courage.

"Promise me."

"I will not."

"Then——"

Espartero seized Robert's arm and was about to strike him, when the bell-boy gave his arm a sudden twist and wrenched himself away.

"Stand back; I am master here!" he cried boldly. "This button connects with the office, and this tube to the same place. I have only to ring the bell and call through the tube to have the night porters up here, and then what could you say?"

"That you were my son."

"Who would believe you?"

"Every one."

"But I am not your son. I know it and will prove it."

"How?"

"Never mind. Time will show."

"Boy, I have need of you, but not just now. I shall not disturb you if you stay here, only I must know where you go to. Will you promise to tell me?"

"No."

"If you will I can show you how to obtain wealth. Perhaps you are not my son. If not, then I can help you. I will be your best friend if you promise me."

"I will not."

A whistle was heard through the speaking-tube.

"I am wanted downstairs; you had better come down with me."

"No; I shall descend the way I came. Ta-ta! I will see you again."

Robert quickly dressed and attended to his duties. The night porter had been sent for to one of the cottages connected with the hotel, where a man was lying sick. As he would have to spend the remainder of the night there, Robert was summoned from his bed to take his place.

Early in the morning the watchman was passing the front of the left wing, when he stumbled over the handsome Mexican, who had fallen from the fire-escape and was apparently badly hurt.

Calling for help, the watchman raised Espartero into a sitting posture.

The poor fellow groaned and moaned in his agony.

Robert was not without feeling, and when he saw Espartero and heard his groans he almost gave way to his emotions.

The two carried the Mexican into the house and placed him on a lounge in the parlor, until the doctor, who was a resident in the hotel, could examine him.

Robert wanted the watchman to summon the doctor, for he was afraid Espartero might mention his name, but the watchman declined.

CHAPTER V.

THE ROBBERY.

Espartero was not hurt so badly as they feared. In fact, after an hour or so, he made a very interesting invalid, lying in state and receiving the sympathy of all the guests.

To all he gave the same account of his fall.

"The night was so balmy," he said, "that I did not care to go to bed. I stepped out on the balcony and sat there smoking my cigar for, I suppose, hours. Then a strong desire to go on the sands possessed me. If I went down the stairs I should disturb some one, and that I had no wish to do. Seeing the fire-escape nearby, I stepped over the balcony rail and got one foot on the iron ladder; but I made a false step, and—here I am."

The story was plausible, and had a basis of truth. He said nothing about his ascent to the top of the house, and so Robert also kept silence.

No nurse was ever more gentle than the bell-boy, for if Espartero was not his father, at least he had paid for his maintenance and education.

The accident was a fruitful topic of conversation all that day, and as the rain fell heavily from early morning until night, the guests were able to discuss the subject in all its bearings.

When evening came the invalid was carried into the ballroom—the doctor had prohibited him walking—so that he might watch the evolutions in which he would like to have participated.

Miss Speranza stood by his side.

"We shall miss you to-night, señor," she said, sweetly.

"There are plenty of cavaliers."

"But none who can dance like you."

"I feel flattered."

"I have spoken the truth."

Miss Speranza was a blaze of light as she moved about the room.

She had diamonds in her hair, around her neck and on her fingers, and as the light fell on them the sparkling was so brilliant that the room seemed filled with constantly-recurring rainbows of unusual brilliancy.

"It is a good thing all are honest here," Espartero said, in a low voice.

"Yes; but why did you make that remark?"

"Because the jewels you wear are equal to a king's ransom."

"Sir!"

"I apologize. My admiration for diamonds got the better of my manners, and I could not restrain my remarks."

What the Mexican expressed every one else thought, and many wondered how wealthy she must be.

In the morning Miss Speranza, with white face and red eyes, which betokened much weeping, entered the office and whispered to the clerk:

"I have been robbed!"

"Impossible!"

"Sir!"

"I mean—I mean—improbable; that is——"

"I have been robbed. My diamond necklet has been taken."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I am. My maid has searched everywhere for it. I know I had it when I retired, and now it is gone."

"Is your maid to be trusted?"

There was a dangerous flash from the beauty's eyes as the question was asked.

"She is as honest as—myself."

"Do you suspect any one?"

"No."

"Tell me where you placed it last night, and how you missed it this morning."

"Jeanne, my maid, had a bad headache, and I sent her to bed before I went downstairs to the dance. When I retired she was fast asleep. I placed my tiara and rings in my jewel case—they are there now—and was about to put my necklet there, also when I became very thirsty. I rang for some ice-water, and forgot all about the diamonds. When I awoke this morning Jeanne asked me where I had put my necklet. I told her on the dressing case. It was not there. We looked everywhere, but it has gone. It was worth ten thousand dollars."

"Where was it when the ice water was brought?"

"On the dressing case."

"You are sure?"

"Of course I am."

"Did you take the ice water at the door?"

"No; I called to Rob to bring it in."

"And he saw the diamonds?"

"If he saw anything."

"You do not suspect Rob? No; he is honest enough."

"Yet he was the last to enter your room. Robert, come here."

"Yes, sir."

"Did you take some ice water to No. 13 last night?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where did you place the pitcher?"

"On the table."

"Near the dresser?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you see any jewelry on the dresser?"

"I did. The diamonds sparkled so I could not help seeing them."

"What did you do with them?"

"With what?"

"The diamonds."

"Left them there; they were not mine."

"You didn't take them?"

Robert's face became scarlet; he trembled violently, and was unable to speak.

"Your manner causes me to suspect you."

"No, I am sure Rob is innocent," Miss Speranza interjected.

"I suspect you. You must stay here while I send for a detective, and I hope—for your sake—that you may prove your innocence."

Robert did not hear the last words. His brain grew confused. He had a vague consciousness that he was charged with theft, and with that thought burning like a hot coal into his brain, he lost consciousness, and fell in a swoon at Miss Speranza's feet.

CHAPTER VI.

"BEFORE HEAVEN, I AM INNOCENT."

"You will oblige me by withdrawing your order for a detective."

Miss Speranza spoke with charming *sang froid* and great dignity.

The clerk looked amazed.

"You have lost your necklet?"

"Certainly I have."

"And you value it at ten thousand dollars?"

"That is its value."

"Then, for the sake of the hotel's name and honor, the matter must be investigated."

"And I say that, should you do so, I will leave the house; and, anyway, I should never prosecute the thief."

"Why, madam?"

"Because——"

Robert Brendan, who had been lying on the floor during this conversation, showed signs of returning consciousness, and Miss Speranza looked down at him, muttering:

"Poor fellow!"

She touched him with her foot, as she might a pet dog, gently and like a caress. Many a well-known man staying at the Glenada actually envied Robert because of that gentle kick.

The boy groaned in anguish of mind, for he knew that even the most innocent are apt to be condemned at times, and he was the last one, as far as was known, to enter the beautiful woman's room.

"Madam, I ask why you would not prosecute the thief?"

Robert listened breathlessly for her answer.

"The gems are such that he could not sell them, and he would wait for the offer of a reward. I could not entrap even a thief, and I would pay the reward willingly."

"It is just such ladies as you—asking your pardon for boldness—that encourage thieves."

"Who are you, sir, might I ask?"

"I am Percy Norman, and have the honor to be employed here as detective."

"Indeed! And did you hear that I would not prosecute?"

"I did, madam, but that is immaterial. If we find the thief we can do without your testimony."

Miss Speranza knew it. The very value of the gems would be evidence enough, for their possession by a poor man would not look like honesty.

The mysterious girl was about to leave the office, when the detective stopped her by asking for a description of the gems, and when she had last seen them.

She answered fully and without reserve; her manner had changed completely, and she appeared as anxious for the investigation as before she had been opposed to it.

Robert Brendan had stood silently by and heard the questions and answers.

He never offered to leave the private office in which the investigation had commenced.

"Do you think I took the necklace?" he asked, suddenly.

Before any reply in words could be made, he saw a smile on the detective's face, which answered him as effectively as the utterance of a distinct charge.

"It can be proved that I have not left the hotel once since last night, before the robbery. Search me, search my room, look in every place I have been. Before Heaven, I swear I am innocent!"

"I believe you, Rob," said Miss Speranza, offering her hand.

For some reason he did not take it, and she appeared offended.

"No, madam; I will never take a person's hand until my innocence is proved."

There was a manly dignity about the boy which caused even the detective to forget his taciturn manner and utter the word "Bravo!" under his breath.

Jeanne, the French maid, was sent for, and she chattered so volubly that not one-half she said could be understood, though the clerk could talk French like a Parisian.

She said she was asleep early, and she, too, demanded that a search should be made.

The investigation was thorough, but no trace of the missing gems could be found.

Their disappearance was a mystery, but all agreed that, whoever was the thief, Robert Brendan was innocent.

An advertisement appeared in New York papers the next day offering a large reward, and giving the promise that "no questions should be asked."

While the investigation had been going on, Robert, even though very much agitated, had noticed more particularly the blood-red rose worn by Speranza, and saw for the first time that small diamond chips were secured to the petals, looking like very brilliant dewdrops sparkling in the sunshine.

Why it impressed him so strongly he did not know, but all day and through the hours of the night that rose haunted him.

Espartero had been examined as he lay on his couch, but as he had not moved from there it was not likely he could give any evidence about the robbery.

He sympathized with Speranza on her loss, and loudly declared any one could see by Rob's face that he was innocent.

Thomas Graham was also positive that his *protégé* was guiltless, though he wished that Espartero had not been so outspoken in the lad's favor.

A three-days' wonder, and the event ceased to be talked about.

The Glenada was more prosperous than ever; not a vacant room existed. Crowds of summer visitors wanted to be able to say that they stayed at the same hotel as Speranza, the lady who lost a ten thousand-dollar necklace and made no fuss about it.

So that her loss was the hotel's gain.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RECOVERY OF THE NECKLACE.

Espartero had become the lion of the season.

He was as great a mystery as Speranza.

One peculiar thing about this man was his inveterate habit of telling the truth about himself, but no one believed him.

He declared in the ladies' parlor that he had been a brigand, and told how he had held most beautiful ladies as hostages for the ransom demanded; and as he told the story the ladies smiled and declared he was the most entertaining *raconteur* they had ever listened to.

"Ah, ladies, you believe me not, but I tell the truth in earnest manner. I have heard the pretty señoritas scream when they saw me, and I almost relented; but then, as you Americanos say, business first and kindness after."

When, one evening, he declared he was a gypsy, the impressionable creatures exclaimed: "How charming! How delightful!" And some one even asked him to tell their fortunes.

But at this request he shook his head.

"I am not a wise man, neither am I the seventh son of a seventh son, therefore have not the gift. Had I, your fortunes should be told, if good; but all the horses Cortez introduced into Mexico would not drag the words from me if those words would cause a tear to come into an eye or a wrinkle to form on the face."

By these speeches he won favor, and both sexes were charmed with him.

He was polite and gallant, almost effusive in his attentions to the ladies, and made no exceptions.

If Speranza had ever met him before, neither gave any sign of previous acquaintance.

Rob had gained many friends since the diamond robbery, for when it was proved that he was innocent, all thought he had been badly used, and he became the recipient of many favors.

A week after the robbery Speranza left the hotel late in the evening wearing a thick veil and clad in the darkest and plainest costume she possessed.

While every one wondered, none ventured a remark, for she was admittedly eccentric.

She was away an hour, and when she re-entered the office her veil was removed, and all saw the sparkle of her eyes and the glow on her cheeks.

"I have got it. See! My necklace, my beautiful gems. Oh! I am so glad. I feel like crying and laughing at the same time."

There were several of the guests in the office awaiting the sorting of the evening mail, which had just arrived, and they crowded around her.

"How did you get it? Where did you find it?"

"Did you pay a reward?"

"Who was the thief?"

The questions followed each other so rapidly that it was impossible for her to answer any of them as they were asked.

"I will tell you," she said. "Rob, come here. Señor Espartero, I want you to come, and you, too, Mr. Graham, for I want you all to know I was right when I said Rob was innocent."

She spoke with all the impulsiveness of a happy girl, and her eyes sparkled quite as much as the gems she held in her hand.

"Yesterday I received a note. It was badly written, and the spelling was even worse than the writing; but from it I learned that if I would take a thousand dollars to-night to the old red barn at the end of Sea View Lane, I could get my diamonds; but I was warned that if accompanied by any one, or followed, I should lose my diamonds forever."

"Were you not afraid?"

"No; why should I be?"

"It might have been a trap."

"What! to get the jewels?"

"The greatest of all jewels, yourself," replied Espartero.

Speranza laughed at the compliment, yet it was pleasing to her, for her face flushed and her eyes sparkled brighter than ever.

"I went. I have just returned."

"Tell us what you did, and whom you saw."

"I did not see any one. When I got to the old red barn I heard a voice say: 'I saw you coming; have you got the dollars?' I replied in a monosyllabic 'Yes,' and then the same voice added: 'Pass them to me. Tie the string around them, and if they are all right, I will lower the diamonds.' I saw a string lowered from the loft, and did as I was bade."

"I should have been afraid."

"Of what?"

"Of losing the thousand dollars as well as the diamonds."

"I never thought of that. I was only too anxious to get my pretty gems, so up went the notes, and a minute after down came the diamonds."

She showed the glittering gems, and laughed musically at the way they reflected the lights.

"Are they not pretty? Rob, I am so glad for your sake."

She hurried to her room, and the guests gathered in groups to discuss the peculiar restoration of the jewels.

Espartero tapped Graham on the shoulder.

"I don't think you quite believe her story; now do you?" he asked.

"Why should I doubt it?"

"I don't know, but I think you do. Now, as for me, I would believe her if she told me the most absurd story—ay! even if she said I was walking on my head and smoking a cigar between my toes."

"Why?"

"Because she is so beautiful."

Robert did not hear the entire conversation, for he was called away to attend to his duties; but he, too, had formed the opinion that Mr. Graham did not completely believe the story.

He had noticed, also, that though Speranza had habited herself in some of her maid's clothes, she wore the red rose very conspicuously.

"I wonder why she wears it?" he asked himself many a time

during the day and his waking moments at night, but could not satisfactorily answer the question.

After that first night Espartero had never shown that he knew Robert Brendan, and the boy was not sorry.

But there was a new mystery which taxed Robert's brains to the utmost.

He was sent to take some hot water to Espartero's room, and on reaching the door he heard voices within.

Knocking gently, he was immediately bade to enter.

Espartero was alone.

True, some person might have been concealed in the closet, but why should such concealment be necessary?

Robert placed the pitcher of water on the washstand and withdrew.

As he was leaving the room he involuntarily turned, and his eyes fell upon a rose, lying on the table, which was either the one so constantly worn by Speranza, or its counterpart.

The boy could not help a shudder passing down his back, for he began to feel that there was a mystery about the red rose which he would like to solve.

Should he tell Mr. Graham of the coincidence?

"No; he will laugh at me; for what is there mysterious in two persons wearing or possessing red roses?"

The idea seemed so absurd that he laughed at it himself and tried to banish the suspicion from his mind.

The quiet serenity of the hotel was soon rudely disturbed by another robbery.

Again the victim lost diamonds, and, unlike Speranza, she suffered a complete loss.

There was a growing suspicion that some of the servants were dishonest, for many of the guests came forward and acknowledged losing little things.

One had lost a ring, another a scarfpin, a third one of those elaborate pins with which some women adorn their hair.

Robert felt, instinctively, that he was being watched more closely than the others, and he resented the suspicion.

But he was powerless.

Had he left the hotel, the suspicion would have become a certainty to many, and he had no other way by which he could escape the unjust insinuations against his honor.

He followed the detective, heard all the questions asked, and wondered why so apparently brilliant a man should fail to detect the thief.

A strange, faint perfume pervaded the room in which the robbery had taken place, and the lady guest was positive she had never used perfume like it.

Robert examined everything as carefully as the detective, but he did more; for, after all had left the room, he took the pillow-slip from the pillow, folded it very carefully and hid it under his vest.

The disappearance of the pillow-slip caused no excitement, for the chambermaid believed the detective had taken it for some purpose of his' own.

For three days detectives were on the alert.

No one could move at night without being watched.

Every one was under the strictest surveillance—and perhaps, as a consequence, the jewelry was safe.

It was the last week of the season before another sensation startled the guests.

Espartero, who had left the hotel some time before, was reported to have been killed in a duel with an American on the banks of the Rio Grande.

The night the news came of the reported duel and death of the

gypsy chief, thieves baffled the detectives and robbed no less than three rooms, that of Miss Speranza being one.

She lost a tiara of diamonds, which her maid had carelessly left out of the jewel case.

The proprietor of the Glenada was almost insane with excitement.

The frequent robberies would ruin the reputation of his house, and cause his downfall financially.

The same perfume was apparent in each of the rooms, and must have been used by the thief.

The guests and servants were called together by the proprietor, and he explained to them how much he felt disgrace attached to the recent and frequent robberies.

"I will do all I can," he said, "to find and punish the thief, and I will give a thousand dollars for such information as will lead to his detection."

"Will you, sir?" asked Robert.

"Yes, my boy, and will double it if need be."

"I will claim that reward, sir, for I will never rest until the real thief is found."

Robert was so much in earnest that no one smiled at his positive assertion.

Would he succeed where the detectives had failed?

We shall see.

"My boy, find the thief, and I will gladly give you the two thousand dollars," replied the proprietor.

Robert thanked him, and boldly added:

"I will succeed, sir!"

CHAPTER VIII.

SUSPICIONS.

The earnestness displayed by Robert Brendan checked the laughter which would otherwise have greeted his remark:

"I will claim the reward, sir!"

In every community there are people who see some suspicious circumstances in every happening. They were to be found at the Glenada, and here and there one of these suspicious people would insinuate that either Robert knew just where the diamonds were, or else that he had been accessory to the theft and was going to become a State witness against his partner for the sake of the reward.

No insinuating were these remarks that even Mr. Graham was puzzled.

There is always plausibility in suspicion.

When Thomas Graham returned to the room to read, he was so worried that line after line passed before his visual organs, but conveyed no meaning to his mind.

"Confound that fellow!" he ejaculated; "I wish he wouldn't hint such things. I believe the boy is honest, and yet——"

That was just the difficulty. There came the suspicion.

What a host of probability arose when once the hint was given.

"What do we know of his antecedents?" one had asked concerning the bell-boy.

"Nothing," was the universal verdict.

Graham knew more, but that knowledge only added to the trouble, for, as he reasoned it out, it looked black against the boy.

"He says he ran away from Espartero, a gypsy, a brigand, and yet, when both are under the same roof, they appear to be strangers."

No wonder that even he should think there was something suspicious about Robert.

He rang for the bell-boy, and when William answered requested that Robert should be sent.

"Sit down, Bob."

It was the first time Mr. Graham had called him anything but Robert, and the change pleased him.

"You wanted me, sir?"

"Yes; but sit down. I want to talk to you as a friend, not as a guest of the hotel."

Robert obeyed, and for some few seconds silence, save for the ticking of the clock, prevailed.

"So you are going to turn detective?" Graham commenced.

"Yes, sir."

"And you think you will win that reward?"

"I do."

"Why?"

The question was asked quickly, with a view to throwing the boy off his guard.

"Because, sir, I must."

"Must?"

"Yes; there are many who think I took the diamonds, and though they have no evidence, my character will be ruined. So, to save myself, I must prove who is the real thief."

"Have you any suspicion?"

"No, sir."

"How do you expect to succeed, then?"

Robert was a philosopher, not through study, but through nature, and clear, calmly and tersely he replied:

"The reason detectives fail generally is that they start in with a strong suspicion; they work on that, try every means to entrap the suspected person, and by the time they have demonstrated their own error, the real culprit has escaped."

"Bob, I am proud of you; I never thought you reasoned so well."

"Thank you, sir."

"May I ask you a few more questions?"

"Yes, Mr. Graham; I will answer you, because it is to you I owe my very life. I thought death would be the best end to my troubles that morning I met you."

"Talk of life, not death. If you have no suspicions, how do you intend to go to work?"

"I cannot yet say. I know the police have telegraphed to all the large cities, and any person offering the diamonds for sale, or to a pawnbroker, would be arrested. So the gems will be difficult to dispose of."

"Do you believe Espartero—you shudder—was really killed?"

"No."

"Why do you doubt?"

"Because I have heard Brendan say Espartero had a happy knack of being killed whenever he was wanted."

"Do you think he is wanted now?"

"I shouldn't wonder."

"You do not think—"

"No. Mr. Graham, I do not think he is a common burglar or sneak thief. He would hold up a man on the road, but he would never enter a woman's room and take her jewelry. I hate him; I am sure he is not my father, but I do not suspect that he had anything to do with the robberies."

"I admire your warmth, and hope you may be right."

"I think I am."

"Bob, you will want money; will you let me help you?"

"Yes, sir; if, when I get the reward, you will let me repay you."

"Certainly."

"Then, sir, whenever I want any money I will see or write to you."

"Do so. It shall be a matter of business between us, and I hope you will make it profitable."

"I shall succeed; I feel sure of it."

"And yet you have no idea where the jewels are?"

"Not the slightest."

Mr. Graham felt it would be useless trying to get any further information from the boy, and so dismissed him.

"I hope he is right. I hope he will find the thief, for his own sake."

In the very short time—less than an hour—that Robert had been with Mr. Graham, a scene was being enacted in the office which changed many of his plans.

Jeanne, the French maid, had asked for Miss Speranza's bill, and for an immediate settlement.

The clerk looked astonished.

"Is Miss Speranza going to leave?"

"*Ma foi! certainement!* Why should she stay where her diamonds, her beautiful di-a-monds, are stolen?"

"We are trying to recover them."

"*Oui, oui*, really, but they are gone."

Miss Speranza entered the office at that moment.

Her red rose blazed forth with brighter hues, and its diamond dewdrops glistened and glittered in the sunlight.

"I want a settlement at once," she said. "I leave in just twenty minutes. I refuse absolutely to stay one more night in your house."

"I am very sorry—"

"Of course—so am I. When I went to school, I was told to write as a copy, 'Soft words butter no parsnips.' Give me back my jewels and I shall know how sorry you are."

"You surely don't think I have them?"

"Some one has."

"Yes, but—"

"As you are all so honorable here," she sneered, "one is as likely to possess them as another."

"You insinuate—"

"Nothing. I only want to leave before all my money, as well as my jewels, is gone."

"I assure you—"

"Nothing more, please. I can stand the loss of my diamonds. If they are recovered give them to Rob. If they are not, well, I shall not know it. Please hurry forward a settlement."

The clerk looked at his ledger and began to make out the account.

Speranza had left a thousand dollars in the clerk's hands, and he was puzzling his brains to find out a way to keep as much of it as possible for the hotel.

When the account was made up it was found that there was a balance of one hundred and five dollars due her.

"Divide that among the servants—stay, I know the proverbial liberality of hotel clerks; give me the money and I will divide it myself."

Do not let it be thought that the hotel clerk overcharged his guest.

She had occupied a most expensive suite of rooms, and had indulged in extras. The clerk hoped the balance would be the other way, but he was disappointed, and had to return to her the hundred and five dollars.

She kept her word, and after dividing the money, left five dollars for Robert.

When he returned from Mr. Graham's rooms Speranza had left the hotel, and the train which bore her away was already a few miles from the Glenada.

"Do you still think you will recover the jewels?" the clerk asked.

"I do."

"Then you will be a lucky fellow, for you are to keep Speranza's diamonds and will get the reward as well."

Rob went to No. 13 to remove an extra table which had been taken from another room.

He walked through the three rooms and looked at every scrap of paper on the floor.

One piece, evidently the flyleaf of a letter, he treasured carefully.

There was no writing on it, but a stain like grease in the corner of the thin, highly-calendered paper.

He noticed the same perfumed air as in the rooms occupied by the victims of the recent robberies.

"It's strange that it should linger in this room more than in the others," he mused; but beyond thinking it odd he gave it no further consideration.

Not until late in the evening, and then he made a sudden resolve to find Speranza and learn from her all she suspected.

"It will be the key to the mystery," he said, "and she may furnish me with the clew I want."

Telling Mr. Graham that he was leaving the hotel at once, and getting that gentleman's address for future use, he astonished the clerk by asking to be relieved from his duties immediately.

No sooner had the boy gone than the clerk whispered to one of the favorite guests:

"The boy knows all about the thief, mark me if he doesn't."

"Why did you let him slip through your fingers?"

"There was no evidence against him."

CHAPTER IX.

BAFFLED.

Every one within five miles of the Glenada Hotel knew Miss Speranza. Therefore, when Robert asked at the depot which way she had gone, the agent at once remembered that she had taken tickets for New York.

"Going there?" asked the agent, thinking Robert was going to follow the mysterious lady.

"Not just yet."

"Oh, thought you were going to the Empire City to seek your fortune."

Instead of answering this scintillation of brilliancy, Robert took a dollar bill from his pocketbook and asked for a single ticket to Watford.

The train came along almost immediately, and so put a stop to any further questioning.

Why he wanted to go to Watford he could not have said, save that all passengers for New York passed through Watford Junction, so the time-tables said; but in reality the little line from Glenada really ended at Watford, and all passengers had to change cars, sometimes missing connections and being kept at the Watford hotel for hours.

Robert was known at Watford, for he had visited the place several times in the interest of the Glenada.

"Hello, sonny! Want a trip cheap?" exclaimed the hotel porter, when he saw Robert cross the platform.

"Where to, Jim?"

"New York. I would like to go, but can't, and I mayn't be able to sell the tickets."

"What are you talking about?"

"Two girls, real stunners, high-up swells, came in from Glenada and changed their minds as to where they wanted to go. I bought 'em tickets for Langton, and then one of them said: 'Are these any good to you? If they are you can have them.' And she gave me two tickets to New York."

"Funny."

"I should say it was, sonny."

"What time was that?"

"What?"

"When they gave you the tickets?"

"Two o'clock."

"And now it is six."

"Right you are, sonny; you are as good as a prophet. Well, will you have a ticket? Take it as a Christmas present from yours truly."

"Wish I could, but I am going to Langton. What time is the next train?"

"Seven-fifty-five."

"Not before?"

"No; you've just missed one."

"Then I must walk. I wonder who the ladies were? Several left the Glenada to-day."

Jim had no idea how to describe a lady's costume or appearance, so after making the attempt, he gave it up, and added:

"Bless me, I don't know whether I am right or not, but I do know they each wore the reddest rose I ever saw."

"Each?"

"Yes, the tall one had hers right up by her neck; and the other on her breast. They were beauties."

"The ladies or the roses?"

"Both."

"I think I know them, but a bell-boy has to have his wits about him to remember every one who visits a summer hotel."

"I should say so; I find it hard enough here, and we never have more than a dozen staying at one time."

"The Glenada has been full all summer; as many as four hundred people at times."

"What shall you do with yourself until the train goes?"

"Stroll around."

"Stay with me."

"Sorry, but I want to get something in the village."

"Then you won't use the tickets?"

"No; but why don't you sell them? A ticket is property, and the railroad will refund the price paid."

"Do you think so?"

"Sure of it."

"I'll try it."

"See you again, Jim."

"All right."

Robert walked up the village street, not that he really wanted to purchase anything, for he did not, but he desired to think.

Why should Speranza change her mind and go to Langton?

Who was the second person? Could it be Jeanne? If so, how was it she wore a red rose and seemed to be on an equality?

The more he thought the greater was his perplexity.

Why have they gone to Langton?

That puzzled him more than anything else, for Langton was about the most uninteresting place he knew.

He walked about the little village until nearly train time.

"Back again, sonny? Really going to Langton?"

"Yes."

"Can't get back to-night."

"I know that; shall be back to-morrow."

"Here she comes!"

The train was tearing along at such a speed that it seemed quite impossible for it to stop at the depot.

But as the platform was reached the speed slackened, a few extra snorts were given, then a last one like a dying groan, and the mighty engine became motionless. Robert was the only passenger, and so the train had scarcely stopped before the engineer had again grasped the throttle and turned on the steam.

The train was an express, and did not stop until it reached Langton? The afternoon train, by which the ladies had traveled, was a slow way train, and made four stops ere it reached Langton.

"Nex' stop Langton!" shouted the brakeman, and closed the door with a bang loud enough to shatter the nerves of any passenger. As an afterthought, he opened it again and shouted:

"Langton, change for Baltimore, Wash'ton, an' points West an' South."

Not that he spoke as clearly as we have written, for the whole sentence was uttered in a single breath, and seemed like one long word.

Again Robert's thoughts were busy, for was it not likely Speranza had gone South or West, and if so, how could he trace her?

He remembered that she had bought tickets only as far as Langton, so must needs re-book, and through the ticket agent she might be traced.

The train stopped suddenly, and jerked everybody about as though they were of no more importance than bales of merchandise.

Robert and an old gentleman were the only passengers for Langton, and the train started again on its way.

"What time is train for Washington?" the old gentleman asked.

"Six-thirty."

"But to-night—"

"No train to-night. Good waiting-room, capital restaurant, good hotel a block away," replied the agent, evidently repeating a frequently-uttered lesson.

The old gentleman grumbled and growled over the chances of a night's misery.

"Waiting-room, indeed! And who wants to spend a night in a waiting-room? Restaurant—does the man think I want to fill myself with sawdust bread and shoe-leather sandwiches?"

The old man spoke loud, although no one was paying any particular attention to him.

Robert had asked the agent various questions respecting the hotel and the village, to all of which the agent was glad to reply, for, to him, Langton was the most important place in the States.

"Many passengers here to-day?" asked Robert.

"You are the first."

"The first?"

"Yes; dullest day we have had for months. Cannot understand it."

"But two ladies came here from Watford by the train leaving there at two-five o'clock."

"Did they?"

"Yes."

"Oh, indeed! Where was I? Was I blind? Two ladies!"

"I happen to know they asked Jim, the hotel porter, at Watford, to purchase two tickets for Langton."

"They never got off here."

"Perhaps they changed trains," Robert suggested.

"Without buying new tickets? Not much. I make 'em all show their tickets before they get into another train."

"Then what could they do?"

"Go on to Oberton."

"Yes, of course, that is the most likely thing. Well, I'll go to the hotel and get some supper and a good night's rest."

"Say, no offense, but I can find you a bed cheaper than at the hotel. How do you like the idea?"

"First-class."

"You'll come?"

"I will."

"I am glad; my wife was wishing I could get her a boarder sometimes, but I've never had the courage to ask any one. She will only charge you a dollar a day. The hotel charges two-fifty."

Robert was glad of the chance to save a little, for he was not too well provided with money.

All the same he wanted to go to the hotel and look at the register.

An opportunity was offered him immediately, for the agent said he had to walk as far as the hotel, and asked Robert to accompany him.

Carelessly, and as though he was doing it to pass away time, Robert inspected the register, and saw that no names had been written there since the preceding day.

Robert was puzzled, but the more perplexing the subject was the greater was his determination to solve it.

He did not sleep that night, but spent every minute evolving schemes by which he might be able to track Speranza, for to find her had now become a mania.

He learned that the conductor in charge of the train leaving Watford Junction at two o'clock passed through Langton at eight-fifteen in the morning, and so Robert booked by that train back to Watford.

The station agent had treated Robert so well that the boy already felt he had a new friend to whom he could apply in time of need.

CHAPTER X.

"MY CHILD! WHERE IS SHE?"

"Yes, we do see strange people," said the conductor to Robert, as the train sped along toward Watford. "Now, only yesterday I had two ladies on board, with tickets for Langton; well, when we reached Blakseton Springs, one of them asked me if my train ran through to New York."

"To New York?"

"Yes."

"Why, you said they were going to Langton."

"So they were, and the youngest said she thought the best way would be to go to Langton, and then to New York. I told her she would have to come back through Watford. She seemed surprised, and asked me how long she would have to wait for a train. You know, ours is a single track, so I had to wait for the down train at Blakseton Springs."

"Did they get out?"

"They were so nice, so fascinating, that I did a thing for them for which I may get censured."

"Did you?"

"Yes."

"You have a kind heart."

"I suppose I have; but what could I do? They said they were anxious to reach New York, so I signaled the down express, and they stepped across from my train to the New York cars, and got their tickets on board."

"Were they poor people?"

"Not much; I should say they belonged to the Four Hundred. One of them had enough rings on her fingers to pay my salary for a year."

"Plenty of jewelry and flowers, I suppose?" Robert hazarded.

"Not many flowers. Each wore a red rose, but that was all."

Robert thought the journey to Watford a long one, and when the train stopped there he caught sight of Jim.

"Hello, sonny! Back again?"

"Yes, it seems so. Have you sent away those tickets?"

"No."

"I will buy one."

"I'll give you one."

"No, no, I will pay you for it."

"Seeing you are so positive, I'll sell you one for a dollar."

"I will give you three—that is half price; and as I am too old to travel on a half ticket, I am getting off cheap."

"When do you want it?"

"Now. I want to catch the fast express."

"Getting quite a traveler, aren't you?"

"Yes; I thought matters over, and guessed the Empire City was the place for me."

"Stay here a day first."

"No; when I make up my mind I am like a streak of lightning. I want to get there at once."

"Well, I wish you luck. There is an express due in half an hour."

"Yes, I want to get that. By the way, did the ladies come back?"

"What ladies?"

"Those who gave you the tickets."

"No; why should they?"

"Because they did not go to Langton."

"Not—go—to—Langton? How do you know?"

"Because the station agent told me I was the only person who had stopped there yesterday."

"That is curious; but then you know a poet says women are:

"Uncertain, coy and hard to please,
And variable as the shade
By the light-quivering aspen made."

"So you read poetry, Jim?"

"Sometimes; it is soothing to the mind and sends me to sleep quicker than anything else except a glass of beer."

Watford Junction was six hours' distant from New York by fast express, but nearly double that time was taken by the ordinary way trains.

Robert was fortunate in getting a ticket at half price, and also in being in time for the fastest train of the day.

When the train had been an hour's distance away from the junction, Robert began to wonder how he should find Speranza.

He had never been in New York, and formed his ideas on the basis of the towns he knew.

"I will go up one street and down another, and if I keep that up I am sure to see her some time."

In the seat with him was a young man just a year or so older than himself.

Robert had been too bashful to speak to him for a long time, but knowing he was going to New York, he broke the ice by asking:

"Do you know New York?"

"Do I? Rather! Do you?"

"No."

"Oh!"

"Is it a large place?" asked Robert, diffidently.

"Crikey! A large place? Why, one street is twelve miles long, and that is not the longest, but it is straight."

Robert's heart sank into his shoes. Twelve miles would be a long street to traverse, but then, of course, Speranza would only frequent the most fashionable parts."

Robert's idea of New York was very vague. He pictured two or three long streets, with shorter ones crossing.

He ventured another question:

"How many theatres are there?"

"Theatres?" repeated his neighbor; "why, let me see, there's—say about forty or forty-five."

Robert sank back in his seat, afraid of asking any other question.

His heart beat rapidly and his spirits became depressed, for he began to see how hopeless his task was.

The nearer New York he got the farther he seemed to be away from the reward he wished to obtain.

His companion left the seat and walked forward to another car, leaving Robert alone with his thoughts.

The train stopped and a number of passengers alighted, while others boarded. But not so many as had left, so the cars were comparatively empty.

Again the wheels were in motion and gathering increased speed every mile.

Everything was passed so rapidly that it became almost impossible to recognize localities or smaller objects.

Forty miles an hour! A mile every minute and a half! What would our grandfathers have thought?

Robert almost lost his breath in wonder, for he had never traveled so fast before.

He was near the door at the rear of the car.

A little child—a sweet girl of about five years—came through the car, looking as unconcerned as though traveling was no novelty to her. Perhaps it was not.

Robert looked at the child, and saw it try to open the door.

Then he realized how dangerous it was for the child.

He arose quickly from his seat and hastened to stop the child, but she was quicker.

She opened the door.

She stood a moment on the platform, unnoticed by the other passengers.

Her hat flew off, her dress was blown over her head.

Robert put out his hand to grasp her.

At that instant the rounding of a sharp curve took her off her feet, and she fell off the steps.

Robert had seized her dress, but the momentum of her fall was so great that he was dragged down.

He slipped to the bottom step.

With one hand he managed to grasp the brake, while with the other he was still holding the child.

The frightful speed, the fearful wind, the awful shower of sharp, cutting dusk and cinders made his position perilous and painful.

He was losing consciousness.

Had no one seen him?

It seemed not.

Just then a piercing cry rang through the car:

"My child—my child! Where is she?"

CHAPTER XI.

"YOU ARE A TRUE HERO!"

There is nothing on earth so agonizing as the cry of a mother for a child she has lost.

"My child! Where is she?"

The cry seemed to ring out so clearly that it rose above the noise of the train as it rattled along.

Every one was up. Papers and books were thrown aside, and a woman, with three children crowded around her, jumped to her feet, allowing a paper of sandwiches, pie, cakes and fruit to slip to the floor, causing great delight to the three youngsters, who were on their knees in an instant scrambling for the delicacies.

The people crowded into the aisle, and thus defeated their own desires, for it was impossible to move through the car.

All this time Robert was hanging on to the car and holding the child firmly.

Had the car been motionless, he could easily have lifted the little one to the platform, but going at the rate of thirty-five miles an hour, the child's body caused such resistance to the wind that her weight seemed ten times as great as it really was.

He clinched his teeth and dared not breathe.

Every instant he felt he would have to let the child go, but if he did he would go with it.

"I'll hold on a bit yet," he resolved, silently, and his heart beat more rapidly than ever.

He had slid down to the bottom step, and one knee rested on the step above.

Why did no brakeman pass across from car to car?

Why, indeed? It always seems to happen thus. The policeman can never be found when wanted, and for some reason no train hand had been on that platform for several minutes.

"My child! My child! Eloise, where are you?"

At the other end of the train, three cars distant, sat the father of Eloise, calm and unruffled.

He was smoking a choice cigar, and its fragrance filled him with delight, while its nicotine soothed and made him feel at peace with all the world.

When the smoke cloud was peopled with its most pleasing illusions, he was rudely disturbed.

The paper boy—that creature who seems to have an inexhaustible store of books and magazines, papers and fruit, candies and cigars, with which to worry passengers who desire to be quiet—walked into the car as leisurely as he usually did, banged the door after him, and approached the happy, complacent father.

"Please, sir, your lady wants to know if the little girl is with you?"

The smoke cloud was peopled with demons now.

Thoughts, fears, doubts, everything of the most horrible nature, crowded the fairies of the smoke away.

Vernon Vane pushed the lad aside, opened the car door, tossed his cigar away, and rushed with all the speed possible to the car in which he had left his wife and child.

He did not wait to hear anything, but was at the other end of the car and saw the trainman acting very strangely.

Out he stepped on the platform, and just in time.

The brakeman had caught a glimpse of Robert hanging to the brake.

He had wrenched the lad's hand away, and found that he had now all he could do to save himself from being dragged down.

Vane saw in an instant what to do.

He pulled the cord—the brakeman had not thought of that—he knew how to signal the engineer to shut off steam.

Then he went down one step and got his arm around Robert.

As he did so he saw his own child still hanging from Robert's hand.

Who can picture the father's agony?

Who can describe his feelings?

"Can you hold on a minute longer?" he shouted in Robert's ear. "I'll try," responded the brave hero, making an effort to speak loudly.

The jerking and jolting told that the brakes were applied to the wheels, and the train commenced going slower.

A minute—sixty seconds only—and the train would be still.

But in that sixty seconds, three—it might be four—lives stood a chance of being sacrificed.

To pull up the two was nigh an impossibility, but as the speed of the train was lessened the task became easier, and Robert, with little Eloise, was pulled to the platform.

They were carried into the car, both unconscious.

Little Eloise was like one that was dead.

Her face was devoid of color, save only the stains of coal and dirt, left as the result of her perilous trip.

Vernon Vane and his wife were almost bereft of reason, for the child was their all.

She had once possessed a brother, a boy who would have been eight years old had he lived, but a year before he had fallen from a pear tree and broken his neck.

It seemed as though the Vane family was doomed.

The train was again started, but all the passengers were interested in the wonderful rescue of the child.

Robert soon recovered consciousness, and was able to tell how the accident happened.

"I felt all the time," he said, "that I couldn't hold on, and couldn't let go."

"You are a hero. A brave, manly fellow!" exclaimed one of the passengers, loudly.

"Papa!" said a little girl to the man who had just spoken.

"Yes, my dear."

"Will they give him a lot of money?"

"Give who?"

"That brave hero, as you called him."

"Why do you ask?"

"Don't the government give heroes a lot of money?"

"Not heroes like that boy, Marie. The nations do not reward the truest heroes, and many a brave man dies poor who deserves a monument."

Little Eloise opened her eyes.

Her mother gave a little scream of delight, followed by hysterical laughter, which ended in tears.

The strain had been too much for her; nature had held back all emotion until that moment, and then it overwhelmed her.

"Where is her preserver?" asked Vane. "Let me thank him. How I wish I could thank him as he deserves!"

Robert was led forward to where Eloise was reclining, and Vane took his hand.

"Never, while Vernon Vane lives, shall you want a friend for what you have done this day," he said, heartily, and yet with voice tremulous with emotion.

"I thank you, sir, but I did nothing."

"Nothing—"

"No, sir. I could not see any one in danger like that without trying to save him."

"But no one else—"

"Saw the little girl, or else all would have rushed to do what fate ordained to be my work."

"You are very modest. May I ask your name?"

"Robert Brendan."

"And mine is Vernon Vane. I always give and sign it in full, because my friends will have it that my first name should be Very—Very Vane, you see," and Vane laughed at the conceit, but his laughter was almost hysterical.

"Where are you going?" he asked, as he stopped his laugh abruptly.

"New York, sir."

"To friends?"

"No, sir."

"Ah, I see! to some situation?"

"No, sir; to seek one. I have to make my own way, and must work to live. I have to find some one first."

"You have his address?"

"Whose address, sir?"

"The one you are going to see."

"I said to find; I have not the least idea in what direction to look. Is New York very large?"

"Bless me! You don't mean to say you are going to look for some one in New York without knowing in what direction to go? What is his trade?"

"It is a lady."

"Worse yet. A man might be found through the directory, but a woman, bah!"

Eloise was sitting up, and was able to tell, in her simple, childish way, how she wanted to go to her papa, who was in the smoker, and had opened the door of the car. The wind was so strong that it slammed the door and she was outside.

Then she told how she tried to walk across to the next car, but the wind blew her hat away, and her curls almost blinded her as they were blown into her face. The crisis came, the train was all on one side—it was going around a curve. She heard the door open, and was glad. A sudden gust of wind blew her down, and she did not remember any more.

The rescue seemed like a miracle, and Robert became a greater hero than ever.

People heard various versions in the other cars, and every one on the train wanted to shake him by the hand.

He had to hold a reception during the balance of the journey, and when the conductor announced: "Jersey City next stop," there was quite a commotion.

The little girl who had spoken about the nation giving heroes lots of money had started an idea.

"Why not raise a purse on the train?"

Marie's father took up the idea and went through the cars.

Every one had contributed, and when the conductor had given the notice of the final stop, Marie's father called for silence in the car, and proceeded to make a speech.

"We all honor the brave. We all feel that heroes should be made, in some way, to realize that their heroism is appreciated. My little girl thinks, as we all do, that Robert Brendan is a hero. Our fellow-passengers may never meet together again, and so they have given Marie a little, and ask, through her, that our hero should accept it, not as payment for services or as a reward, but simply as a token of appreciation, a souvenir of our trip."

When he had finished, Marie gave Robert a parcel, which was said to contain twenty-seven dollars and fifteen cents.

Robert had no time to reply, or to refuse the gift, for the train had stopped, and all were hurrying and skurrying to get their things together and reach the ferry.

"Come home with me, Brendan," said Vane.

"No, sir. I thank you, but I want to commence my work."

"You will call and see us?"

"Some time, yes."

"To-morrow—come and dine with us, and go to the theatre after. I am manager, you know, or perhaps don't know, and we open next week, so I am pretty busy."

"I will see you to-morrow, Mr. Vane."

"That is right. We dine at five, but come as early as you like. Wish you would come now."

Robert was confused. Never had he seen so much bustle. Which ferry should he take? He thought there was only one, and found there were three starting from the same point.

He took the middle one, and found that it landed in a downtown street.

A boarding house was found, and Robert paid for bed and breakfast in advance.

The next day he started out to see New York and commence his work.

All day Robert walked up and down the streets, and when night came he sat down and cried.

"It's no use—it's no use; I shall never find her. I shall never get the reward. I will give up."

That was a sensible resolve, and early next morning Robert found Mr. Vane and offered him many apologies for not fulfilling his promise to dine at Murray Hill House the night before.

Robert was perfectly honest in the matter, and said truthfully that he had forgotten all about it until it was entirely too late.

Vernon Vane laughed, and insisted that Robert should spend the entire day with him, so that there should be no other chance of forgetfulness.

Eloise was pleased to see her young preserver, and showed him all her toys.

CHAPTER XII.

NEW SENSATIONS.

New York was given a sensation on the Monday following Robert's arrival which threw into the shade the theatre openings.

Vernon Vane had invested many thousands of dollars on a new spectacle, and expected that all New York would flock to see it, and that on the morrow all Gotham would be reading and talking about it.

Robert had taken a position of usher at the theatre, actuated by two motives.

It gave him an opportunity to make enough money on which to live, and he would see all the fashionable people in New York.

This latter was his real motive, for he knew Speranza was fêd of the theatre, and that, if she were in the Empire City, she would assuredly see the new spectacle.

The house was crowded. It was a regular first-night audience; boxes, parquet and circle presented an array of brilliant costumes and sparkling jewels.

It was a gay scene, and to Robert Brendan seemed too beautiful to be real. It was a picture of Fairy Land.

He examined every face, watched each one as opportunity was afforded, but no Speranza.

He saw several who had been guests at the Glenada, and was delighted to see Thomas Graham, who had not forgotten him.

"Glad to see you, Robert. Have you given up your work?"

"No; Mr. Graham."

"Then you are combining the two?"

"Yes; I want to find Miss Speranza——"

"I saw her in the park to-day."

"You did?"

"Certainly; she was driving in a phaeton, with a spanking pair of horses."

"Did she see you?"

"If she did she never showed it. I am not in her set. I think she must be a princess in disguise."

Robert's duties called him away, and he had no further opportunity of conversing with his friend and patron.

But his thoughts were with the subject of the conversation.

"Speranza driving in the park," he thought. "So, then, I will be able to see her, and I can follow and find where she is staying."

Vernon Vane was excited. The house was appreciative, and he was confident that on the next day the papers would devote considerable space to his new venture.

Events were transpiring that night which upset his calculations and crowded out more than a few lines of criticism.

To enlighten our readers, and not keep them too long in suspense, we must go back a little and speak of the journey taken by Speranza and her French maid.

The poets have said, in all ages, that woman is fickle, and had they known Miss Speranza, they would have had very good reason for their opinion.

In all good faith she had started for New York, but with a sudden impulse she thought that newspaper reporters and detectives would be on her track to interview her respecting the loss of her diamonds.

To the surprise of Jeanne, she gave the tickets, as we have seen, to the porter at Watford Junction.

"Jeanne, I shall go to Baltimore, but shall only take tickets to Langton."

"Yes, mademoiselle."

But before Langton was reached she had again changed her mind.

"Jeanne, we will go to New York, after all. What do I care about the reporters or detectives? Besides, who will know us?"

The maid was accustomed to all the vagaries and uncertainties of Miss Speranza, so said nothing.

The conductor arranged the transfers, and six hours later the eccentric girl was in New York.

She called a carriage and drove to one of the most fashionable uptown hotels.

Search the register of the hotel and no such name of Speranza appears, but there is inscribed thereon in bold and dashing chirography the name:

"The Baroness Montalembert."

And underneath we find:

"Mademoiselle Fonblanque."

Should we take the elevator and enter the suite of rooms just opposite the grand staircase and bearing the number 9, we should find a lady with a strong resemblance to Speranza, and another who could easily be mistaken for Jeanne.

And we should not be wrong if we declared that the two persons we had met at the Glenada were identical with those bearing the foreign title and names at the fashionable New York hotel.

It soon became known by society that a real, live baroness was in New York, and those un-American people who dearly love a title called and left their cards, and, what is more, invited the baroness and her friend to all sorts of semi-public receptions.

As for Speranza, otherwise the Baroness Montalembert, she laughed at the cards, and openly sneered at their senders, of course, before Jeanne, who was now no longer the French maid, but the companion and friend.

"Jeanne, is it not nice to be one's self again?"

"I don't know; I think it was very nice to be rural and—unknown, at the Glenada."

"So did I. But—"

"You like the flattery you get."

"Did I not get plenty there? Did not every one, even that austere man, Graham, flatter me?"

"Yes, and so did Señor Espartero."

"Don't mention his name." She paused for a moment or so, then suddenly asked:

"Do you know Rob's address?"

"Rob?"

"Yes, Robert Brendan, the bell-boy."

"Why, no."

"I wish I did."

"Whatever for?"

"I would make him my private secretary."

Jeanne laughed so immoderately that some of the stitches in her tightly-fitting dress gave way.

"How absurd. Perhaps he cannot write."

"Yes, he can, and well, too."

"But what do you want a secretary for?"

"A fad, that is all. It would look well; besides, I would rather have that boy near me."

"Why?"

"I am superstitious."

"Mr. Graham would know his address."

"Then we will try and find him."

It was the opening night at the ——— Theatre, and Speranza thought she would go, but changed her mind, and went to the Academy instead.

When she returned to the hotel and entered her room, she gave a little scream.

"I have been robbed! Oh, it is cruel, cruel! All my lovely diamonds gone!"

"All?"

"No, but my necklace and star."

She rang the bell and summoned the clerk.

Soon the hotel was a scene of the greatest excitement.

She gave a description of the jewels, and authorized the offering of a reward.

"Madam, do not do so; at least, not yet," said the detective "The thief will be caught and punished."

"I will leave it in your hands."

The clerk was seen to read a message handed to him, and to turn pale.

He gave the paper to the detective, who also changed color.

Turning to the baroness, he said, in a low voice:

"You are not the only victim."

"Not—the—only—victim?"

"No; Mrs. Groneau has been robbed, and Miss van Dam, also, and each complains of losing diamonds."

"Indeed? It is strange!"

"Very strange!"

The telegraph wires were set to work, and every police station, every pawnbroker and jeweler received notice of the thefts. The railroad and steamboat piers were almost immediately watched. Reporters were soon on the spot, and the columns of the papers the next morning were filled with long reports of the great diamond robberies.

But the reports gave descriptions of the ladies who had been the victims, and their beauty was made the subject of lengthened eulogies.

Robert Brendan walked about the park all day, and was so tired when the time came to go to the theatre that he could scarcely stand.

He did his work conscientiously, and mastered his weariness.

The curtain was about to go up when a lady brushed by him.

Instantly the thought came to his mind:

"Tis Speranza. Never have I inhaled that odor since I did so at the Glenada."

But even as he thought of it he remembered that the same odor pervaded the rooms of those who had been robbed.

He looked around the house, scanned every face in the parquette and boxes, but without recognizing any one until, just before the act was over, he looked at a proscenium box, and in the shadow he saw the face of Speranza.

Robert visited her box between the acts, and the beautiful woman showed great pleasure at seeing him. She invited him to dinner next day at a party composed of Thomas Graham, who was now in New York; Vernon Vane, with whom she had become acquainted, and a lawyer friend of hers.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PRIVATE SECRETARY.

Thomas Graham, Vernon Vane and the lawyer dined with the Baroness Montalembert that evening at her hotel, and at her right hand sat Robert Brendan.

After dinner the entire party became Vernon Vane's guests at his theatre, where the largest box was set apart for their use.

The evening before Robert had been one of the ushers; now he occupied a seat in the box by the side of a real, live baroness.

Such eccentricities fate sometimes delights in.

As he sat there, he scarcely saw the play; he was conversant enough with it, for he had watched it develop at the rehearsals, and had witnessed its beauties several times from the front.

But his mind was agitated; he was thinking over all that had taken place during the day, and more especially of a conversation he had that afternoon with Speranza.

"I want a private secretary," said Speranza, "and I offer you the position. I shall not pay high salary at first; I have thought it all out, and offer you forty dollars a month, and, of course, your board, for you will travel with me. Will you accept?"

She was a pretty good judge of human nature, and knew that the more businesslike the proposition the greater the probability of its acceptance.

Robert was delighted with the offer, as well he might be, for he only got thirty dollars a month at the theatre, and had everything to find.

But he was in a dilemma, and, like a straightforward boy, he determined to tell Speranza everything.

No, not everything, for he never referred to Espartero, or to his life before his engagement at the Glenada.

"I must tell you all," he said. "I wanted to see you. I followed you to Watford; it was on one of your tickets I traveled to New York. I traced you part way to Langton, found you had come to New York, and followed you here."

"What for?"

"I wanted to see you. It was with the chance that you would go to the theatre I accepted the position of usher."

"That was lucky for you—perhaps."

"It was lucky, very."

"What did you want to see me about?"

"The diamond robbery."

"You think——"

"That you have some suspicion of the thief. It is the work of my life to find the thief and bring him to justice."

"No, don't say that."

"Why should I not?"

"He is punished enough."

"How do you know?"

Robert was bold when he felt he was doing right.

"Any one who does a wrong action lives in perpetual fear of being found out, and that must be torture."

"But he will sell the diamonds and be rich!"

"You are young, Rob, and do not know. There never was a rich burglar yet. Easy come, easy go. The majority live in absolute poverty. They get very little for the jewels, and what they do get they lose very quickly."

"But I was accused——"

"Yes; but you were innocent."

"All do not think so."

"Perhaps not, but you may never see any of them again."

"The world is small. I have already met you and Mr. Graham, and the other day I saw Mr. Snellgrove on Broadway."

"You will ruin your life if you persist in your determination."

"My life will be ruined if I fail."

"Be it so. I will place no obstacles in your way. I shall not help you, but will not hinder. You accept my offer?"

"I must see Mr. Vane."

"He dines here to-night."

"And Mr. Graham."

"He, too, will be with us."

"Then, subject to their approval, I accept."

"One thing, Robert—I suppose I must call you that rather than Rob—I am a creature of impulse. Sometimes I like to get away from myself, forget my rank, and title, and wealth. I masquerade as a poor girl sometimes, and once went to a town as Jeanne's maid; it was funny, and I enjoyed it. I tell you because you must never be surprised at anything I do."

"No, madam."

"Don't talk about me outside; don't know me unless I ask you so to do; don't be suspicious. I am a Bohemian in my manner at times, so never judge me by the standard of other people."

Robert heard all this, and his brain was in a whirl.

At times he thought Speranza must be slightly deranged; then he remembered how clear-headed she was, and he put down all her peculiarities to eccentricity.

"Do you play any instrument?" she asked.

"I tried to learn the mandolin."

"Splendid; I will teach you; you shall play duets with me."

"I am very slow to learn music."

"Soon get over that; I will play something for you."

She took the mandolin and played so sweetly that Robert was enchanted.

Never had he heard such music before.

At first she improvised, and the music was soothing and soft; gradually the strings gave forth chords almost angrily discordant, and again the music changed into sweet cadences, and Speranza sang, softly:

"It may be that this world is bright and fair;
Bright and fair,
But that these eyes of ours are dense and dim;
Dense and dim,
And have not power to see it as it is,
Perchance because we see not to the end."

There was a prophetic meaning in those last lines impressed on Robert's mind, and he sighed as Speranza laid down the instrument.

At dinner Speranza detailed her plans and propositions as made to Robert, and asked Vane and Graham what they would advise him to do.

Her offer seemed so good that they could not think of suggesting his declination.

The lawyer, thinking of his profession, suggested an agreement, and Speranza was perfectly willing, only she said: "Perhaps Robert may get tired, and an agreement or contract would be irksome. Let us act with mutual trust for a month or so, and then we shall know each other better."

Everything was settled, and a room engaged for Robert.

Late as was the hour when he reached the hotel after the theatre, Speranza was not too tired for a talk.

Gradually she allowed the conversation to drift to the robberies at the Glenada.

Why, she could not tell, for she had asked Robert never to speak of them.

"Do you think it possible to find the—the—thief?" she asked.

"Yes, I shall do so, even if it takes me all my life."

"But you have no clew."

"Yes, I have."

"You have?"

"Yes; I have an article which belonged to the thief, and on it there is the same mark as was found on the pillow from under which the diamonds were taken."

"A mark; do you mean——"

"A stain, made by the same person in the same way. Are you not well? Jeanne—Jeanne—Mademoiselle Fonblanque—come, the baroness has fainted!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ANONYMOUS LETTER.

"What have you done?" exclaimed Jeanne, angrily, when she saw Speranza lying on the lounge in a swoon.

"I?"

"Yes, you! I always said that it would be better if she never saw you again."

"Why?"

"Leave the room! No, stay—get me some Florida water."

Robert had no idea where to find the Florida water, and looked confused.

"You are silly! Can't you open the door? No, not that door," as Robert approached the door leading into the hall—"her bedroom door."

The impulsive French girl pushed Robert aside and got the desired perfume, but before its volatile odor could have time to cause the reaction which would lead to Speranza regaining consciousness, that lady opened her eyes.

Her recovery was as sudden as her swooning.

"How silly of me! I am really tired out. Leave me, Robert, and we will continue our talk some other time."

Robert wondered about the whole thing.

He had never been able to study fashionable life, and to him a swoon was a sign of some organic disease.

He was worried about Speranza, for he was strangely interested in her.

Why did she object to the discussion of the robbery of her jewels?

Was there some hidden secret of her life which might be exposed if she appeared in court as a witness?

It did not seem possible to the mind of the unsophisticated Robert.

For hours he studied the subject, and grew more than ever perplexed.

Was he always to be baffled in his search for the criminal?

How easy it seemed, in theory, to detect a violator of the law, but how different in practice!

Early next day Jeanne found Robert alone in the parlor, and at once asked him of what he had been speaking to the baroness.

"We were talking of the robberies."

"I thought so."

"She asked me——"

"You ought to have more sense than to converse on such a subject."

"Why?"

"Because——"

Speranza entered the room and extended her hand to Robert. It was evident he was to be treated with consideration.

"I want you to answer my correspondence," she said, throwing a number of letters across the table.

The seals were unbroken, and Robert waited for her to open the envelopes and signify her wishes.

Speranza laughed as merrily as a young girl as she saw his confusion.

"Am I to open them?" he asked.

"Of course; you are my secretary."

"But——"

"But"—she repeated, with a laugh—"you must learn to save me

trouble. I do not want to be bothered with a lot of society invitations. You must accept or decline, just as you think best."

"Madam, I am ignorant of the world——"

"So much the better."

"And——"

"Well, well, open the letters and read them to me, and we will see what is to be done."

Robert opened one and read that. Speranza was invited to a reception at a large house on Fifth Avenue.

"Declined with thanks. It is my title they invite, not myself. Just say I regret being unable to accept—you know what to say. Sign it with your own name."

"As secretary?"

"Yes."

The next letter was anonymous, and caused Robert's face to color.

"Drive through the park alone on Wednesday, between three and four."

Robert crumpled up the letter and threw it on the table.

"Between three and four—let me see, have I any engagements? Call Jeanne, will you?"

Jeanne entered, and in answer to Speranza's questions replied in the affirmative.

"Then you must postpone them. I have a fancy to drive in the park at that hour."

"But this is anonymous."

"That is just why I am going through the park, Robert. I am very curious, and I want to see what the letter means."

"You will not go alone?"

"Of course."

"It may be a trap."

"Yes, it may be, and in that case you will have to find me, and pay the ransom."

"But——"

"Read the next letter."

Robert shuddered involuntarily; there was so much mystery about Speranza that he was perplexed.

Letter after letter was read, and the answers suggested.

Suddenly Speranza asked:

"Was there any name or initials on the handkerchief?"

"To what handkerchief to you refer?"

"Didn't you say you found one in one of the rooms robbed?"

"No."

"I must have dreamed it; I thought you said so."

"No, madam."

"What did you say, then?"

"I said I had an article with a thumb stain on it."

"A thumb stain?"

"Yes."

"What clew is that?"

Robert forgot all his caution and became excitedly enthusiastic.

"The thumb, or the lines of the thumb, presents the best clew to identity possible. No two person's hands are marked alike, and the thumb is so peculiar that no mistake could possibly be made."

"Robert, how absurd! Every thumb is alike."

"No; and the right thumb is differently marked to the left."

"Well, how is that a clew?"

"Suppose that a thief should press his thumb on some substance and leave a mark—that would be sufficient for identification."

"But how are you going to get the thief to show his thumbs afterward? Are you going to suggest that every one should play the game of 'thumbs up'?"

"I don't know how I shall do it. The thief left a thumb mark on the pillow-case in one room, and in another I saw the same mark on a sheet of paper; the lines were exactly alike."

"Have you read all the letters?"

Speranza changed the conversation quickly, as though she was tired of the whole subject.

"Yes."

"Then you might go and answer them. By the way, Robert, never talk about me outside."

"I should not think of doing so."

"Your hands are nearly as small as mine; hold out your left hand so that I may read your future."

Robert obeyed the whim, but Speranza scarcely noticed it, save to place a diamond ring on the third finger.

"Just your size, Rob. Wear it for my sake."

He was about to offer it back, but Speranza insisted that he must keep it.

CHAPTER XV.

WITH BANDITS IN MEXICO.

Wednesday morning came and Speranza stayed in her room; she had a headache and was irritable, so Jeanne said, and did not wish to see any one, not even Robert.

Scarcely had Jeanne explained the situation to the young secretary before Speranza sent for him to come to her boudoir.

She was dressed in a pink silk wrapper and looked even more bewitchingly beautiful than ever.

The secretary told her how sorry he was that her head troubled her.

"I would give all I possess to be free."

"Cannot you get relief?"

"No; only death will give it, and I often wish death would come."

"Do you suffer often?"

"Not so often as formerly. I—why should I not tell you? It will be a diversion."

Speranza sighed wearily as she spoke, and Robert wished she would allow him to send for a physician, but he knew she was self-willed.

"Three years ago I was traveling in Mexico. I was younger then than I am now, and believed more in humanity. Jeanne was with me; she is my cousin, you know, and my constant companion and friend. My husband had been dead nearly a year, and left me all his wealth, and he was very wealthy."

"We had been to the City of Mexico, and recalled all the ancient glories of Montezuma. I was always fond of history, and I tried to find every place that the great king had visited."

"Jeanne suggested that I ought to go to see that terrible mountain, with still more terrible name, Popocatepetl, which they tell me is Mexican for smoking mountain."

"I went; there was a party of us, but I was the most daring."

"In fact, I frightened my friends, who thought I should never return alive."

"Have you read anything about Mexico?"

"Not much, but I have heard a great deal."

"Then you will have heard of the wealth of Montezuma, how he covered the walls of his palaces with pure gold and made his floor of onyx. I wondered where all the gold had gone, and I dreamed, or fancied—the same thing, you know—that a great deal of the gold was hidden somewhere in Popocatepetl."

"Jeanne laughed at me for thinking so, and the others told me all sorts of fairy stories of what would happen if I ventured into the smoking mountain."

"Did you go?" asked Robert, his eyes flashing with nervous pleasure.

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"Yes; all were too afraid to go with me. I bade them *au revoir*, and started to walk through one of the narrow fissures; they are not wide enough to be called canyons."

"Soon I found the path so narrow that I grazed my arms on the walls."

"Deeper and deeper grew the fissure, until I could see the stars overhead, though it was midday."

"Shall I tell you what I wished?"

"Please do."

"You won't laugh?"

"No."

"Sure?"

"Quite sure; but does not talking make your head worse?"

"My head? I had forgotten my head ached. Well, it does not now, so I will continue my story. I wished that there was some path to the right or the left through which I could have returned. I did not like to go back because I should be laughed at, and that is one thing I cannot stand."

"So on I went, the path getting darker and darker, and my heart beating faster."

"I was in there an hour, and saw no chance of finding the gold of which I was in search."

"I'll go on for five minutes more," I said to myself, and began to count, for it was too dark to see a watch. I counted two hun-

dred and stopped. I stood in a little square, from which four passages led.

"It was light in the square, but I saw the passages were entirely subterranean, and quite dark.

"I determined to retrace my steps, and return some other time with a lamp.

"I had stayed in the square so long that I had forgotten through which passage I had entered, and as all looked alike I was more than ever puzzled.

"After examining each passage I fixed upon one and made a quick movement, anxious to reach my friends.

"The most unearthly noises greeted me, and I really expected my hair would be gray by the time I emerged."

"Did you find the same passage?" Robert asked, with excitement.

"No; I found I had made a mistake when I had proceeded some distance."

"Did you turn back?"

Robert had become so interested that he could scarcely wait for Speranza to tell her story.

"No, I went on, and found the passage was a shorter one; but when I emerged I had no idea in what direction I should find my friends. The country was strange to me, and though the scenery was grand, sublimely so, I would rather, at that moment, have seen my companions than the grandeur of nature.

"There was no person in sight, so I could not inquire my way. My feet were aching, my limbs so tired that, in despair, I sat down. I did worse than that; I cried, and, like a baby, fell asleep.

"When I woke I heard voices. I opened my eyes just a little, so that I could see through the lashes, and the sight nearly caused me to faint.

"A dozen men, barbarous-looking and desperate, were watching me.

"I saw at a glance they were bandits.

"Had they recognized me? If so, my life would be of little value, and yet life was so sweet that I quickly made up my mind to give them all my wealth rather than die.

"One of them, evidently a leader, saw me move, for he addressed me in Spanish.

"He said they had waited long enough for me to wake, and would suggest that I accompany them quietly.

"I asked them who they were, and the man laughed, but did not reply.

"Come along," he commanded, and I arose to my feet.

"Where to?" I asked, and the man became more civil, perhaps because he saw that in my belt I had a dainty little revolver. It must have been that for he asked me to give it to him."

"Did you?"

Robert was standing in an attitude of defiance, his hands clinched as though he would have liked to meet the bandit and strike him to the ground.

"No."

"I am so glad!"

"I took it from my belt and pointed it at him, and told him to take it if he wanted to, but that if he touched me I should shoot.

"He laughed and bade me follow. I had to obey, and for nearly an hour I walked in the midst of those outlaws. At first I was silent and angry; then I began to talk; I found them fairly well educated and really good conversationalists.

"We reached a house, made of adobe, and with windows so small that one could not put a hand through. They were long and very narrow. Just the place for soldiers, was that house, and I have no doubt it was built to withstand a siege.

"When the door was closed I was a prisoner, sure enough.

"What do you want with me?" I asked.

"Señora, we know you. You are the Baroness Montalembert. You are worth one million dollars. We want just half that. Ensure us that amount and no harm will come to you."

"How am I to give it to you? I have not that amount in my pocket," I replied.

"They told me all had been arranged. My cousin could be sent to, and she could bring the money to a certain place where they would be.

"I asked them if they were not afraid she might betray them.

"The leader laughed heartily as he answered, in the coolest manner, that he should kill her to prevent her tongue wagging.

"I refused to enter into any bargain. The brutes then suggested that on the morrow they would begin to persuade me. I was en-

lightened as to the meaning of their persuasion. I was to lose a toe each day, than a finger, and if I still held out my ears and nose were to follow. If I was still alive, I was to have a week in which to decide, and if I held out my head was to follow my ears and nose. I was quick at figuring, and as I had ten toes, as many fingers, two ears and a nose, and was only to lose one each day, I had twenty-three days before my head was endangered."

"You thought out all that?"

"Yes; it was fun to me at the time."

"Were you not afraid?"

"Not much."

"Why?"

"I trusted in my good luck. I was left alone—not alone in the house, but in that room. It was a long night, and I did not sleep. Toward morning I found myself wondering what the sensation of having a toe cut off would be like, and mentally hoped they would start with the smallest toe, so that by the time they reached the big one I should be used to the sensation.

"When one of the bandits brought me a big pitcher of coffee and some bread and grapes, I could have let him take two toes, for I never tasted such coffee in my life.

"After breakfast I was told that my toes were safe for that day, for the captain was coming, and he should decide my fate.

"Of course I was not sorry. So I waited, drank more coffee at noon, and longed for an interview with that captain. It was evening when he came. The room was dark. He entered and made a most profound bow. I looked up, and saw that he was masked. His voice was low and gentle, and his manner most deferential. There could be nothing to fear from such a man. He called me by name, and to reassure me that he meant to act kindly, he held out his hand. I gave him mine, and we chatted like friends instead of jailer and prisoner. I noticed he held my hand all the time, but he had such a brotherly manner in all he did that I did not mind it. I felt many a thrill pass through me as he held my hand, but that was all.

"He dropped my hand with an apology, and told me he was willing the band should release me if I would consent to certain conditions.

"They seemed very simple. I was to leave Mexico within a week, and promise that, wherever I might be, I was to wear a red rose which he would give me. If ever I went without it he would find means of knowing, and I should soon fall into the hands of the band again, when nothing short of the absolute loss of all my fortune should save me."

"That is why——"

"I wear the red rose? Yes."

CHAPTER XVI.

ROBERT'S HEROISM.

There was silence for several minutes, and Speranza's face was as white as country snow.

Robert's face was flaming red; he thought that the mystery of the red rose was solved, and yet wondered why she should still wear it.

Surely Mexican bandits had no power in New York.

His face evidently betrayed his thoughts, for the first words spoken by Speranza proved that she knew what his brain had been puzzled about.

"You wonder why I still wear the rose? I will tell you. I accepted the bandit's terms, and I never break a promise. I was at once liberated, and did not lose as much as a Mexican dollar. I left the country within a week, and do not think I shall ever go back."

"Was the chief of the bandits Señor Espartero?"

"Good gracious, Robert, what do you mean?"

Her surprise was genuine, and Robert could not understand it, for he had been sure that his reputed father was really the one who had liberated the beautiful and wealthy lady.

"I—I—heard—him say——"

"That he was a bandit? Oh, you must take no notice of what he said. He told me he was also a gypsy. What a bad character he gave himself!"

"He wore a red rose."

"Did he?"

"Yes; not always, but——"

"Many wear a red rose; it is a favorite."

"Then Señor Espartero was not the chief of the bandits?" asked Robert, with pertinacity.

"I did not see his face, and the name he gave me was— But I must not tell you. Anyway, it was not Espartero, and you must not harbor suspicion against your friend."

"My friend?"

"Yes; at the Glenada Señor Espartero said it was a pity you should be a bell-boy, for you were bright and intelligent. I was of his opinion, and that is why I offered you your present position."

"Did he tell you anything about me?"

"How could he? What could he know? I knew you before he did, and— But, there, he spoke well of you, and that is enough."

"Do you think you would know the bandit chief again?"

"If he clasped my hand and spoke Spanish, I think I might; but I did not see his face. Robert, never speak of this again. Leave me; my head is beginning to ache again. Ring for Jeanne, will you?"

When Jeanne entered the boudoir Robert left and went to his own room. He had been told he was free for the day, and was glad, for he wanted to be alone with his thoughts.

The whole subject was a mystery to him, and he found himself weaving all sorts of complications out of the adventures of Speranza with the brigands of Mexico.

He sat down in Madison Square and watched the people move about, with renewed interest. What secrets that crowd must have, what adventures many must have had.

If all minds were laid bare, what strange revelations would be made.

In the midst of his imaginings he heard his own name spoken, and looking up, saw Eloise Vane, with a hoop as tall as herself.

"Come and show me how to trundle it," she said.

Robert, young man as he thought himself, proud of his age, and feeling that he was no longer a boy, yet liked Eloise so much that he took the stick from her hand, and sent the hoop wheeling along the park, and gave her a lesson in the art of trundling it.

The child was delighted. She laughed and shouted with joy.

She cared not for the people, but clapped her hands and praised the skill of the young secretary.

Robert entered into the spirit of the sport, and thought that there was nothing so exciting as trundling a hoop for the pleasure of such an enthusiast as little Eloise Vane.

Mary, her attendant, knew Robert, so felt that the little one was safe.

She sat down and was soon oblivious of everything as her mind became absorbed in the plot of a novel she had brought with her.

Eloise caught the knack, or acquired the art, very quickly, and was soon so proficient that she could keep the hoop bowling for a quarter of an hour.

The hoop got away from her once and went into the roadway on Fifth Avenue.

The child was so excited that she ran after it.

The avenue was full of carriages.

The cars were going up and down with awful rapidity; private carriages darted hither and thither, now crossing the avenue, and then speeding along, stopping suddenly and unexpectedly, and never heeding the pedestrians who wished to cross.

In the midst of this animated tangle the child's hoop bowled along.

A score of people shouted to Eloise to come back and leave the hoop to its fate.

Robert ran across the grass, though such an act was forbidden.

"Eloise! Stop!" he cried.

She did not hear.

A groan escaped from an old lady as she saw the child dodge in front of a spirited horse.

The little one did not realize the danger.

Right in front of a street car she ran, and again escaped being hurt.

She was within a few feet of the Fifth Avenue pavement when the hoop fell over.

She was close to it.

A cry of joy escaped her as she stooped to pick it up.

A clanging of a bell, the galloping of horses, the shouts of a number of men, told that a fire engine was tearing down the avenue.

Eloise stood paralyzed.

She saw her danger.

Her lips moved, but she could not speak; she tried to jump on one side, but her limbs refused to move.

On came the engine.

The avenue was too crowded for the hacks, and carriages, and wagons to move on one side.

An instant more and Eloise would be beneath the hoofs of the horses, and her life crushed out. But in that brief space of time Robert had leaped forward and grasped her dress.

With a sudden impulse he threw her from him, and jumped after her.

She fell on the curb, while he was caught by the nearside horse and spun around and around by the shock, until he fell just as the last wheel of the engine passed.

It seemed like a double tragedy.

People held their breath.

Horses were pulled in, carriages stopped, a crowd gathered.

How easy it is to get a crowd in New York streets.

The slightest thing, the least excitement, and hundreds are gathered together in an instant.

Eloise opened her eyes.

She looked at the crowd.

"My hoop! Don't say I've lost it," she cried.

She did not know the danger she had passed through; she was too young to realize that for a second time in her short life she had been within a hair's breadth of death.

"Are you hurt?" asked a sympathetic lady.

"Hurt? No. Where's my hoop?"

"Did you fall?" asked another.

What an absurd question! But how naturally it seemed to ask it.

"Mary!" cried the child.

"Bless you, my angel! The good God has saved you again!"

"Mary, take me home. I feel tired. Where's my hoop?"

Neither Mary nor Eloise gave a thought for the time to Robert, who was lying silent and helpless on the hard stones of the gutter. Some one had rung for an ambulance, and the clanging of the bell told of its arrival.

The surgeon bent over the unconscious youth.

"He lives!"

"Thank Heaven! He did as brave a thing as any one ever did," said a man, as he looked on at the prostrate hero.

The surgeon felt Robert's limbs and found that none were broken, then examined his ribs.

"Not so sure!" was his muttered comment.

Robert was lifted carefully into the ambulance, the bell clanged, the driver touched up his horse, and the ambulance started toward the hospital, followed by a crowd of men and boys.

The avenue assumed its usual guise, carriages and cars, hacks and wagons, came to and fro, and no one, a minute later, thought of the tragedy which might have happened a few moments before.

The reporters knew of it, and almost before Eloise reached home the evening papers were out, and Vernon Vane read of the narrow escape of his little one from death.

At the hospital Robert was slowly recovering consciousness, and when he was able to articulate, he asked:

"Is she injured?"

"No."

"Thank Heaven that I was able to save her."

"You are a true hero. It was a brave deed, and the papers will proclaim your courage," said the nurse, kindly.

CHAPTER XVII.

"DISMISS YOUR SECRETARY."

Among the crowd that had gathered around Robert at the time the ambulance surgeon was examining him was a tall, handsome man whose bearing would indicate that he had received a military training.

By his side was another man whose aspect was the direct opposite.

He was short, his face was far from expressive, his body was so loosely put together that it gave the impression that the various parts had been like a subscription book, taken in at different times and bound together by an amateur.

A more ill-assorted pair it would be difficult to find, yet the two were evidently the best of friends.

The smaller man was an echo of the other, and while agreeing

with everything the taller did, it seemed a wonder that he should not also imitate him in dress and tidiness.

"Poor wretch!" ejaculated the tall man.

"Poor wretch!" echoed the other.

"A brave fellow; I never saw a braver one."

"Neither did I," the shorter man responded.

"I wonder if he has any friends?"

"I wonder."

"Adelbert, we must find out."

One of the onlookers, on hearing the short and slovenly man addressed in such a way, and with such a high-sounding name, moved away to hide his uncontrollable laughter.

When Robert was placed in the ambulance and driven to the hospital, Adelbert thought it his duty to follow.

He called a cab and bade the driver follow the ambulance.

His companion stepped up to a policeman,

"From what hospital is that ambulance?"

"Bellevue."

"Will they take that brave young fellow there?"

"Yes."

"Sure?"

"Of course! why shouldn't they?"

"I thought, perhaps, he might be taken home."

"You did, eh?" one of the finest ejaculated. "Then you thought wrong. Ambulances ain't private coaches."

The man thanked the policeman for his information and turned away.

But he was possessed of a very great amount of curiosity, for he asked a bystander if he knew whether the little girl was hurt.

Then he wished to find out her name and residence, but with but very little satisfaction.

Later in the day he bought an evening paper, and found out that the child was Eloise Vane, and that her father was the able and efficient manager of a theatre.

But the paper had not been able to learn, at the time of going to press, the name of the brave youth who, at the risk of his life, had saved the child.

An hour later Adelbert and his aristocratic friend met in a saloon in Wooster Street.

"Well?"

"Bellevue."

"You are right."

"Badly shaken."

"Bones broken?"

"No."

"Any friends?"

"Not yet."

"Then we must act."

"Is it wise?"

"Adelbert!"

The word was uttered in such a tone that the slouchy one felt it a reproach that he should dare to question the wisdom of anything suggested by the other.

"I—I—meant—is it necessary?"

"It is."

"When?"

"To-night; meet me at seven."

The men paid for the drinks they had ordered, left the saloon as though they were strangers to each other, and went in different directions.

That they understood each other was evident.

At a quarter past three o'clock on that afternoon Speranza and her cousin drove to the Fifty-ninth Street entrance to the park.

Speranza alighted and Jeanne returned to the hotel.

For a few moments the baroness appeared to hesitate; then, calling an open landau, which was waiting to be hired, she bade the coachman drive quietly through the park.

Speranza was troubled; her bosom heaved with emotion—she was laboring under some terrible mental anguish.

As the carriage moved along her trepidation increased, and the red rose, which she wore so conspicuously, quivered, and its diamond dewdrops reflected the sun's rays and scattered them in a thousand dazzling colors.

A gentleman was walking along with leisurely ease as the carriage passed.

He lifted his hat as he recognized the occupant.

She ordered the coachman to stop, and the pedestrian entered the carriage.

He, too, wore a red rose.

Taking her hand in his, he held it for an unusual length of time.

"You have kept your word," he said, glancing at the rose.

"Yes," murmured Speranza, falteringly.

"You do not seem pleased to see me?"

"No."

"You may never see me again."

Speranza could not talk. Her agitation was too great.

She knew that the man by her side possessed a strange power over her—a power which could compel her to do anything he chose, even if her own will was used in resistance.

When he said she might never see him again, a flush of joyous hope passed over her face and her heart gave a glad bound.

"But if I never see you again," he added, slowly and deliberately, "I shall still claim your obedience. You will still work with me."

With sudden energy she confronted him.

"What is this power you have over me? What means it? At times I dream you tell me to do wrong, and I do it in my dreams. Why should I think of you? Why am I thus tormented?"

"Tormented?"

"Yes! I know of no better word. I hate you——"

"Hush! Walls have ears, as they used to say when we were children."

She had forgotten the coachman, forgotten that every word could be heard by him. In her dislike of her companion she had felt alone, with only the detested one as a listener.

She looked at the coachman, but he was calm and self-possessed. From his appearance and manner he had not heard a word, yet nothing had escaped him.

Speranza spoke in a lower voice when she asked her companion why he had sent for her.

"Now you talk reasonably."

"Do I not always?"

"No. I want you to do something, which will be for your good as well as mine."

"What is it?"

"You have a secretary."

"How do you know?"

"His name is Brendan—Robert Brendan."

"What of that?"

"You do not deny my assertions?"

"Why should I?"

"Do not equivocate. We are talking about a matter of business. I ask you again, is it true that you have engaged Robert Brendan as your secretary?"

"Yes."

"I thought so."

"Why are you interested in my private affairs?"

"Because—there, that is a woman's reason. I want you to send Brendan away."

"Where to?"

"Don't you understand?"

"No."

"Dismiss him."

"What for?"

"Because I say so."

"He does his duty."

"Very likely."

"I like him."

"That I do not doubt."

"Then why should I dismiss him?"

"I have already told you."

"And if I refuse?"

"You will be the sufferer."

"In what way?"

Speranza had, by an effort of her will, remained perfectly cool, though she was boiling over with indignation, but controlled herself as well as possible.

"I refuse to say."

"Then I refuse."

"You will not dismiss Robert Brendan?"

"I will not."

"Is that your final answer?"

"It is."

"Very well, madam; you will find that whenever the League of the Red Rose decrees a thing it will be executed, and Robert shall not remain your secretary."

"We shall see."

Speranza stopped the carriage, her companion stepped out, lifted his hat most courteously, and was soon lost amid the throng on the driveway.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ANXIETY.

Speranza entered her parlor pale and trembling.
 "Jeanne! Jeanne, where are you?"
 Her cousin was surprised at the impetuous and irritable conduct of the baroness.
 "You are not well?"
 "Yes, I am very well."
 "What has annoyed you?"
 "I am put out. I wish—oh, so much—that I had let those brigands take my toes, my fingers, my head, rather than that I should be forever obedient to their will."
 "What new demand have they made?"
 Speranza did not answer; she looked at the red rose, and, snatching it from her bosom, threw it across the room.
 Jeanne picked it up and placed it on a side table.
 "Why not see the police? I am sure the superintendent would assist you," suggested Jeanne.
 "I am afraid. Jeanne, I have an idea. I will go to Europe to-morrow; it is too late to-day."
 "To Europe?"
 "Yes, we will go. It will be a change. I shall be free then. These invisible chains are killing me."
 "It might be wise to go."
 "Wise? Of course it is. I—ring for Robert."
 "Mr. Brendan is not here."
 "Not here?"
 "No. Have you forgotten you said you would not need him to-day?"
 "I have forgotten everything. Why was I ever born? Jeanne, that man held my hand again, and I am in his power."
 Jeanne Fonblanque looked at her cousin for a moment.
 Her lips were tightly pressed together, and any one could see she meditated some prompt action.
 Locking the door and slipping the key in her pocket, the cousin, who had been so long the slave of the whims and caprices of her wealthy relative, arose to be master of the situation.
 "Speranza, this has got to stop," she said, with calm deliberation.
 "What do you mean?"
 "Just what I say. You are rich and powerful; I am poor and dependent on you. I risk all by telling you the truth. You are going mad."
 "I know it; I am mad."
 "No, not yet; you are only the victim of delusions. You fancy those Mexicans have power over you——"
 "Imagine!"
 "Yes, imagine. The idea has got so firmly planted in your brain that if he—their chief, as you call him—told you to commit murder, you would do it."
 "I should have to; he would make me."
 "Absurd! Get rid of this nonsensical idea, or I will apply to the courts and have you adjudged insane."
 Speranza sprang to her feet.
 All the horrible possibilities of the threat seemed to burn into her brain.
 "You dare not!"
 "I dare, for your own good. Why, I could prove it easily. You are tormented with fear, you walk in your sleep, and all the time fancy that you are in some one's power."
 "I will break loose. If only Robert were here!"
 "But he is not."
 "Jeanne, do you think he is at Vane's?"
 "Most likely."
 "I will telephone for him."
 "What absurdity!"
 "It is not. I am sure my safety depends on my leaving for Europe to-morrow. What ships sail?"
 "Thursday? Let me see. Why, the German line steamships sail on that day."
 "You shall book passage for three."
 "Three?"
 "Yes; you will go, and Robert."
 "Why not leave him behind?"

"You, too, Jeanne! That is just what that man ordered."

"What?"

"That I dismiss Robert."

"He was wise for once."

Speranza did not notice the remark, but went down to the office and was about to telephone to the Vanes, when a new thought changed her plan.

Hurrying back, she put on a wrap and ordered a carriage.

She had heard from Brendan where the Vanes resided, and gave the coachman orders accordingly.

How long the journey seemed.

Of course the coach got tangled up twice in the cars and wagons, and so delayed the fair lady.

At last Murray Hill House was reached, and the baroness was admitted.

Eloise ran to the "booful" lady and told how the brave boy had saved her.

"Is not Robert Brendan here?"

"No; we have not seen him."

"He was not hurt?" she asked.

Mrs. Vane's face grew white.

"I am afraid so. Mr. Vane has gone to inquire."

"Where?"

"To police headquarters."

"I will go, too."

"Better wait for Mr. Vane; he ought to be here soon."

The advice may have been good, but circumstances thwarted Speranza, and made her feel most miserable.

Mr. Vane did not return.

After learning that Robert was at the hospital, and telephoning there and finding he was progressing favorably and would most likely be taken home that evening, he called at the theatre.

There he met some business men with whom he had many things to talk over.

The time passed and Mrs. Vane became anxious.

She telephoned to the theatre, and was assured that Robert was all right and would go home that evening.

Speranza was pleased with the message, and hastened back to her hotel.

Robert had not returned.

The evening was young, and no doubt her secretary had gone to call on Mr. Graham.

She was all excitement.

Jeanne was packing, and Speranza must help.

The hurry and confusion and bustle drove all thoughts of Robert from her mind until the pretty clock on the mantel struck ten. Then she became alarmed.

"I must go and find him," she said, with emphatic nervousness.

"How can you? Why not telephone?" asked practical Jeanne.

"You may do so."

Jeanne went to the telephone and rang up the hospital.

Institutions, like government, are ruled by red tape, and more than half an hour elapsed before the authorities vouchsafed any information.

"Then the answer came, clear and distinct:

"The patient you ask after left the hospital at ten minutes past nine."

There was a certain consolation in the answer, though Speranza could not understand why Robert had not at once returned to the hotel.

When eleven struck she grew nervous and dispirited, but Jeanne more practically declared that "boys would be boys," and Robert was all right.

"He will be here first thing in the morning."

With that assurance Speranza retired for the night, still determined to sail for Europe the next day and break, by that means, the invisible fetters which bound her.

CHAPTER XIX.

TRAPPED.

Robert awoke to find himself lying on a narrow cot in a large room at the hospital.

There were a number of similar cots, and each one was occupied.

It was not a pleasant place by any means, for the signs of great suffering were everywhere manifest.

At first it seemed like a vision of the night, a dream to him.

He could not understand where he was, nor why he was lying on a cot in such a place.

He watched the nurses move about, and saw screens drawn quickly around certain beds.

In one case his keen perception led him to the conclusion that the patient was dead.

It is not pleasant to be in the presence of death at any time, but to be lying in the same room makes it doubly uncanny.

He began to wonder whether it was real, and gradually his memory went back to the Madison Square scene.

He saw the sun's rays glittering and dancing on St. Gauden's Diana on the top of the Madison Square Garden tower; then he saw the greensward, the well-kept roadways, and at last his mind reproduced the scene of little Eloise and her hoop.

He knew all now.

He knew how he had tried to rescue the child, and had fallen himself.

Was he hurt so badly that he had to be brought to the hospital? He did not feel badly, only stiff and sore.

His head was aching, and as he put up his hand he felt the ice-cold compress on his forehead.

The nurse came and shook up his pillow, but he felt unable to speak to her.

She moved about mechanically, and never noticed that his eyes were open.

Later the doctor came, looked at him earnestly and turned away. "Doctor!"

"Ah! you are awake. What is it?"

"Can I go home?"

"No."

"Why?"

"You are not strong enough."

"But if I ordered a carriage?"

"We will see—later. Now, do not go and excite yourself, or you may get brain fever."

Robert sank back on his pillow, wondering why he must stay there when he felt so well, except for the very unpleasant headache.

While his mind was occupied trying to unravel the mystery, nature stole away his senses and he slept.

When he opened his eyes again he saw the doctor standing by the cot.

"Is your name Brendan?"

"Yes, doctor."

"Do you know the Baroness Montalembert?"

"I am her secretary."

"It is all right, then."

"What is?"

"She has sent for you."

"How did she know?"

"It is in the papers. You are spoken of as a great hero. The first edition did not know much about it, but Vernon Vane has been interviewed and has told all about you."

Robert's face flushed.

He had no love of newspaper notoriety and did not feel himself to be anything of a hero.

"Can you stand?" asked the doctor.

Robert put his feet on the floor; he was still dressed, and, though he felt slightly giddy, made a good effort at standing.

"Take my arm."

Robert was glad to do so, and with the doctor's help, managed to walk into the reception-room.

As he entered he saw a man rise from a chair and advance to meet him.

"Ah, my good young sir, you are very brave. You do not know me? No wonder. Great heroes do not know humble servitors, but I have the honor of serving the great and beautiful Baroness Montalembert."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, but sit down. The doctor says you are strong enough to go home. I feared the worst when I came, for some said you had concussion of the brain and must die."

"Did Sper—the baroness send you?"

"I serve her well. I am a steward of some of her property, and when I came to her hotel she says, 'Adelbert—my name is Adelbert Simkins—I am most inconsolable; my dear friend, my brother, I may call him—she really did say that—is dying perhaps at that wretched hospital. Go find him, tell him to come home; find out if he is well enough to move.'"

Robert had listened to the man calling himself Adelbert Simkins with a certain amount of suspicion.

Why he distrusted him he could not say.

The man was a slouch; his clothes were ill-fitting, his legs and arms seemed as though they did not belong to him, but were hung on his body because he must have such appendages.

Speranza was averse to untidiness, and would not have any one about her who was slovenly.

"Will you tell the baroness that I will return in about an hour?"

"My dear Brendan, why wait an hour?"

"I want a little more rest."

"Good; I will wait for you. The carriage is at the door."

The doctor had returned and heard the last remark.

"You are well enough to go, and it will be better to have company," he said.

"I want—" Robert did not like to say he preferred being alone, or that he was distrustful of the man, so added: "Quiet."

"Quite right, my dear Brendan; just what the baroness said. She even asked me if I objected to riding on the box, so that you might have room to recline."

Brendan wondered whether he had misjudged the man, and when such a doubt arose in his mind he held out his hand to Adelbert.

"I will go with you."

Adelbert smiled and took the outstretched hand.

"The baroness will be so pleased."

"Are you ready to start?"

"I will go and see that the coach is at the door, and then we will bid adieu to this abode of the afflicted."

Adelbert left the room and Robert was alone for a quarter of an hour.

When the emissary returned he was full of apologies.

The coachman was driving up and down the street, and it had taken longer than he thought to attract his attention.

Robert leaned on the man's arm as he walked down the steps into the street, and as he did so he could not help fearing the arm might fall off.

Adelbert opened the coach and assisted Robert to get in.

"Lean back and rest, my dear sir."

"Will you not open a window?" Robert asked.

"The doctor said not. The night air would not be well for you."

The door was closed, Adelbert mounted to a seat beside the coachman, and the horses started.

The young secretary felt that he was going to faint. The coach was stuffy and ill-smelling, and the jolting made his brain reel.

Once he thought he would stop the coach, but lacked the energy. His head sank on the cushions, and soon he was lost to all feeling or suffering.

Adelbert chuckled to himself.

"I don't know why it is necessary," he thought, "but, seeing that it is, I am just the man to make it a success."

Aloud he said:

"Poor young fellow. He hurt himself so by falling that he is quite light-headed. He scarcely knew me when I went in. And yet I have known him all his life."

It would have been strange had Robert known or recognized Adelbert Simkins, for he had never seen him since the time when the young child was left in the hands of old Brendan by his reputed father.

The coach stopped, not at the palatial hotel occupied by Speranza, but before a tenement house on the East Side.

The surroundings were not the most *recherché*, but for a deed of darkness were just right.

Adelbert descended from the box and opened the coach door.

"Poor fellow!" he exclaimed, "he has fallen asleep. He is so weak. How sorry I am to wake him."

The coachman, kind-hearted man as he was, suggested that the two should carry Robert into the house. "If you would be so kind as to help," said Adelbert, "it would be a good idea."

"Certainly! Poor chap, he looks like a dead 'un."

"Don't say that, you give me the creeps. I never like to think of death."

Robert was, as the coachman said, like one from whom all life had departed.

The two men carried him into the house, up one flight of stairs, and into a parlor sparsely and shabbily furnished.

Robert was laid on the lounge, the coachman received a dollar extra as a "tip," and Adelbert was alone with Brendan.

"I feel awful mean," he soliloquized, "and if I could get away from such dirty work I would do so; but my oath—come, come, Adelbert, this will never do. Members of the League of the Red Rose should never think. No, never—think."

The man looked at his watch and saw that the hands pointed to half-past nine.

"Ah, ten was the time. I shall be there to report. He will sleep two hours yet. Good!"

Robert Brendan slept on, quite unconscious of his surroundings. When he did wake he felt that his head was aching so badly that sleep was best, and he turned over on the lounge and fell asleep. Not for two hours merely, but until seven o'clock the next morning he slept undisturbed.

With a start he awoke and looked around him.

"Where am I?"

Everything in the room was strange and his mind was still too clouded for him to realize that he was really a prisoner.

He looked at the pictures; they conveyed no meaning to him; he looked from the window and saw a dirty street, with crowds of people walking to and fro.

"I remember now. I was in the hospital, and was sent for! But Speranza does not live here. It is strange. What does it mean?"

He went to the door; it was locked.

He tried the windows; they were nailed down.

"I am trapped! But by whom?"

His face flushed, his heart beat rapidly, and his brain grew dizzy as he thought of Espartero.

"Can it be he has trapped me?" he asked himself. "Why should he want me? I hate him."

CHAPTER XX.

"WITH WHOM WERE YOU DRIVING?"

When Speranza found on the Thursday morning that Robert had not returned, she was filled with the greatest anxiety.

Her passage was booked on the North German Lloyd steamer, and she had fully intended sailing to Europe, perhaps never to return.

But the absence of Robert upset all her plans.

As a matter of courtesy she notified the steamship company that the rooms would not be used.

Of course she had to forfeit the passage money, but that to her, was a mere bagatelle.

Jeanne was kept busy. From the steamship office she was sent to Vane's, and from there to the residence of Thomas Graham.

Neither of Robert's friends had heard anything about him after he had left the hospital.

The doctor in charge described Adelbert, but the description did not correspond with that of any one known to Speranza.

After exhausting every method within her reach, she consulted the police superintendent.

The interview was most embarrassing. Everything seemed known to the keen sleuth.

Robert's whole history, for the last twelve months at least, seemed like an open book.

"He was accused of robbery?" the chief of police asked, in a most insinuating manner.

"Yes, but he was innocent."

"Of course; but how do you know it so positively?"

"I feel it—I—"

"Yes, that is so. It is an inward consciousness; I understand. So, to befriend him you engaged his services as secretary?"

"Yes."

"You were at the Glenada incognito?"

"Yes."

"By the way, baroness, with whom were you driving yesterday afternoon?"

The question was asked so suddenly that Speranza was, for a moment, nervous and full of anxiety.

"My cousin," she answered, as soon as she could compose her nerves.

"And what did you say his name was?"

"His? I said my cousin, Mademoiselle Fonblanque."

"Oh! But after you sent her home, did you not drive in the park with a tall, handsome man, who wore a red rose—now I come to think, I may be mistaking you for some one else, I really beg your pardon."

Speranza laughed merrily at the sleuth's mistake, though her

mirth was very superficial, and she knew that her every movement had been watched.

At any risk she must clear herself.

"You referred just now to a gentleman I met in the park. He wanted to see me about Robert—Mr. Brendan."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; he is much interested in him."

"In what way?"

Speranza wished she had never entered the police headquarters.

"He objected to him being my secretary."

"Why?"

"Because of the suspicion——"

"Then he must be interested in you."

"No, not at all."

"Baroness, I will try and find this Brendan for you. I believe with you that he is innocent."

"Thank you!"

"Good-day!"

With all a courtier's grace the chief sleuth-hound of the city bowed her out.

"It is strange," he soliloquized; "she certainly met him by appointment, and yet what connection can there be between them? She is wealthy, that I know; she has everything to make life happy, yet she meets and drives through the park with a notorious—steady, steady, I only think he is a swell thief. I may be wrong."

A general "hue and cry" was sent out to all the precincts, and before night every policeman was on the lookout for Robert Brendan.

Toward sundown a message was sent to Speranza, asking her to go to the morgue to see a body which had been found floating in one of the docks.

She was afraid the shock might be too much for her nerves, so sent Jeanne.

It was not like Speranza. She was usually so considerate of another's feelings; but in this case her wish was imperative and amounted to a command.

Jeanne was not any stronger nerved than her wealthy cousin, but philosophically she accepted the task, and with a shrug of the shoulders she said that "Robert dead could do her less harm than Robert living."

When she reached the morgue she soon satisfied herself the corpse was not that of Robert Brendan, and she had endured the sickening ordeal for nothing.

How fared it with Robert all that day?

The hours passed monotonously, and were wearisome.

In a great city like New York people mind their own business so closely that murder might be committed in one room, and the inmates of the rest of the house only hear of it after the police had commenced their investigations.

If Robert shouted for help, it would not cause any one to go to his assistance.

Adelbert had used the room for a long time, and Robert was not the first enforced inmate.

It was generally believed that Adelbert Simkins was in the employ of some private lunatic asylum, and it was necessary, at times, to keep a patient overnight in the city.

Hence any call for help would be unheeded, and cries would only be looked upon as the ravings of an insane person.

Robert heard people walking up and downstairs, and to them he appealed.

He shouted through the keyhole that he was a prisoner, but no one took any notice.

Then he asked for food, told the people he was hungry, that he had money to pay for it, but again his appeals fell on deaf ears, for all thought it was the cunning of a madman which prompted such a ruse to obtain liberty. So during all that day he was without food.

When night came he was desperate.

All day he had been wondering how he could escape, and had examined the windows, but found it impossible to get out that way.

He had a strong knife in his pocket, and when all was still he started to cut out one of the door panels.

He was surprised to find how thin it was, and wondered why he had not thought of that way out of his difficulty before.

Five minutes' work and he was able to crawl out into the hallway.

He had left the work until the house was still, and all its inmates had retired to rest.

He groped his way downstairs and found the door locked. What a creaking noise the key made in turning. He descended the few steps into the street, and shuddered as he saw the wretchedness depicted all around him.

Which way should he turn?

In what direction must he go to reach the hotel where Speranza was staying?

He was in a strange locality, and had nothing to guide him.

He walked down the street, then along another, which seemed to be endless.

If only he could find a policeman he could inquire the way; but the police seemed to have other work on hand, for not one did he meet until he was in sight of the East River.

"Can you direct me to," he hesitated, and after a pause, "Broadway?"

"Yes, young man, I can; but if you go on that way you'll have to cross the briny and have a trip around the world."

The policeman tried to be facetious.

Robert was too hungry to enjoy a joke.

"Will you tell me where I can get a cup of coffee?"

"Bless us and save us! there's a St. Andrew's stand at the corner of the next street, or there's an all-night coffee and cake mill on the next block."

"Thank you; good-night."

Robert was nearer the latter place of refreshment than he anticipated, and was soon enjoying the hot cakes and equally hot coffee.

How good the food tasted to him.

He had just finished the last cake, and had called for a piece of pie, when the policeman entered.

"Ah!"

The ejaculation was emphatic and joyous.

"Ah!"

Robert looked up when the second exclamation was uttered, and thought it must refer to the pie.

"It does look good. Can you join me in some pie and a cup of coffee?" Robert asked, in all sincerity, for he felt so much better since he had satisfied nature's craving that he could be friendly even to the policeman.

"What, try to bribe an officer? No, sir; it will not do. Your name I ought to know."

"Indeed, and it is no secret; it is——"

"Robert Brendan," added the officer.

"How did you know?"

"You do not deny it?"

"Why should I?"

"Well, you're a queer cove. Most would have sworn black was white in such a case."

"Explain yourself."

"Eat your pie first, and then come with me."

"With you?"

"Yes; I'll take good care of you."

"What do you mean?"

"You are wanted."

"What for?"

"Blest if I am going to tell you! in fact, I don't know. I only know you are wanted at headquarters, and you'll reach there before morning."

"I am ready, but you might have had a cup of coffee; and, as for bribing you, why should I? I am perfectly willing to go to headquarters; in fact, rather anxious to do so."

"As you are so pressing, a cup of coffee——"

"And pie."

"——and pie, would be soothing this cold night."

"That is sensible. I will have another cup to keep you company; then we will go together wherever you wish."

CHAPTER XXI.

POLICE HEADQUARTERS.

The news was telephoned to headquarters that Robert Brendan was safely ensconced within the walls of a station house.

"What was to be done with him?" asked the captain.

"Hold him," came back the answer.

The superintendent gave orders that, should Brendan be found, he was to be held until further orders, which meant that the chief of the New York police wanted to interview the lad about whom Speranza was so anxious.

Robert was sitting in the office, fast asleep, when the captain

shook him and told him that he was to be held until further orders.

"Will you sit here all night or go to a cell?" he asked.

"I'll stay here, if I may."

"Of course you may, or I should not have given you the option."

Robert was soon asleep again, and rested very comfortably, though the chair was hard.

It was nearly morning when he heard a voice which sounded familiar.

It was that of Adelbert Simkins.

Robert feared Simkins was looking for him, and was afraid to raise his head.

"I have done nothing," Adelbert said. "I'm as innocent as a babe."

"Of course; we do not doubt that, we only want to have a little talk with you."

Robert turned away so that his face was entirely hidden, and pretended to be asleep.

"What is the name of your friend?"

"My friend?"

"Yes; that tall, fine-looking man whom you left at the door of the music hall last evening."

"Tall—fine-looking—music hall—I——"

"Yes, in the Tenderloin district?"

"You are mistaken."

"Perhaps I am; I do make mistakes sometimes."

Robert noticed the peculiar accent of the speaker, and was sure that it was not the captain of the precinct who was speaking.

He was afraid to look up, but knew that the speaker was some one who knew how to question a witness.

"When were you at Bellevue last?"

Robert became deeply interested.

"Bellevue?"

"Yes, the hospital?"

"I never was an inmate there."

"Is it another of my mistakes?"

"Yes."

"Indeed! then it was not you who called there the other evening and asked to see a patient?"

"I—I——"

"A patient called Robert Brendan——"

"Oh!"

"Ah, you remember now. Where is Brendan?"

"I—don't—know."

"I don't think you do. But what did you do with him?"

Adelbert was trembling with fear.

He could not speak, so his tormentor continued:

"Do you know the Baroness Montalembert?"

"No, I——"

"So you do not know her? Did you ever hear of Señor Espartero?"

"The Mexican?"

"Yes."

"I have read of him."

"Only read, eh? Well, what about his half-brother, Señor Graganza?"

"I do not know him."

"A very good thing that you do not."

"Why?"

"He is a bold, bad man, and all his friends are liable to practice the lock-step at Sing Sing."

Adelbert was very uneasy, and his teeth chattered when he heard the order given that he was to be locked up until further orders.

The superintendent, for it was he, turned his attention to Robert.

"Do you know him? Do not pretend you were asleep, for I know you were not."

"Yes; he took me away from the hospital."

"Do you know the other people I mentioned?"

"Who are they?"

"The baroness—I was her secretary—and Señor Espartero."

"Where did you see him last?"

"At the Glenada, in the summer."

"Brendan, I want a talk with you. Come with me to headquarters."

"I am a prisoner, sir, so must needs obey."

"You are perfectly free. We only arrested you to return you to your friends."

"Is that so?"

"It is; what did you suspect we arrested you for?"

"That I could not say, sir. I knew I was innocent of crime."

"You were suspected once?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you were innocent?"

"I was; and hope to prove it even yet."

"So I have heard. Can I not help you?"

"No."

"I think I can."

"You would laugh at me if I told you how I expect to succeed."

"I am sure I should not. Come with me, and talk as freely as you like. I will never divulge a word unless you consent, and you shall have all the help you need in following up the clew."

Robert did not hesitate now. He knew the reputation the chief of the New York police possessed, and resolved to trust him.

A cab was called and the two drove to headquarters, but not one word relating to the mysterious robberies passed between them.

They chatted on various subjects foreign to that which was uppermost in each mind.

When Mulberry Street was reached and the door of the superintendent's room closed, each breathed a sigh of relief.

Robert told about his detention after he left the hospital, and how he had escaped.

There must be a motive for it, and the sleuth was weighing the matter over in his mind, but did not utter his thoughts aloud.

"Your clew, what is it?" he asked, abruptly, interrupting Robert in the middle of a sentence.

It seemed a breach of good manners, but doubtless long experience with unwilling witnesses had sanctioned it.

"You will laugh."

"No, I never laugh at theories, however absurd they may appear."

"Do you believe in palmistry?"

"To a certain extent."

"Then you will understand me. Have you ever noticed that the lines on the thumb differ with each person?"

"No."

"I think you will find that they do."

"Well?"

"I read about the thumb lines in a detective story some time ago."

"Never mind that."

"It was from that story I learned that the markings differed."

"But do they?"

"Yes; look at your own and then at mine."

"But age may make a difference; I am old enough to be your father."

Robert was discouraged, and looked it.

The superintendent rang the bell and a sergeant entered.

"Sergeant, we are discussing palmistry; I want to take an impression of your thumbs."

Some prepared paper was produced, much to Robert's surprise and delight, and not only did the sergeant leave his thumbs' impress on the paper, but every man about headquarters did likewise.

It was then seen that there were clearly distinguishable differences, not only in each person, but between the right and left thumbs.

"You are right, Brendan; I have learned something. But now for your clew."

Robert took a small bill case from his pocket and laid before the officer a portion of the pillow slip upon which a thumb was clearly impressed.

He told when and where he had obtained it.

Then he showed the sheet of foreign paper, and proved that the lines of the thumb mark there were identical with those on the pillow-slip.

"That pillow-slip was taken from a room at the Glenada, from which diamonds were stolen, and that paper was found in another room, which had also been visited by the burglar."

The officer examined the articles through a powerful magnifying-glass, and appeared very interested.

"What do you think, sir?"

"Those marks are made by a woman."

"A woman?"

"Yes; one with small hands and very fine, clear skin."

"What makes you think so?"

"The breadth of the thumb is less than that of a man, while the lines are more clearly defined."

"What would you advise?"

"Start in at once and make a collection of thumb marks. Make it a fad. Get all your friends to help you in the collection. Become an enthusiast, keep your prepared paper always by you; let none escape, and—this is important—bring your book of impressions often to me."

"I will do so."

"By the way, who is Mademoiselle Fonblanque?"

"The cousin of Speranza."

"She is, eh?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"I was told."

"Never believe all you hear. Find out for yourself. I do not believe in Mademoiselle Fonblanque."

"You do not?"

"No. She is from New Orleans?"

"Yes."

"And was known there as plain Jane Mason?"

"How do you know?"

"I investigated."

"What made you?"

"Duty, Brendan, duty."

"But she—"

"Is Mademoiselle Fonblanque, cousin to the Baroness Speranza Montalembert, and you must take no notice of what I have been saying."

"One question sir."

"And that is?"

"Is Speranza really a baroness?"

"Yes, she is all she claims to be."

"Then why the deception about Jeanne?"

"You said 'one question,' and that I answered. Go home now, tell Speranza everything except our conversation about thumbs and palmistry. Of course Jane Mason does not exist; she is Jeanne Fonblanque to you now and for all time."

CHAPTER XXII.

PALMISTRY.

When Robert arrived at the hotel he found the place all in confusion.

Another glaring robbery had been committed during the night, and a quantity of jewelry taken.

The mystery was all the greater because, since the first robbery, a special detective had been employed, and every newcomer watched most closely.

The thief must have been a resident in the house, yet all were of the greatest respectability.

The detective was positive the servants were innocent, because the wing of the building devoted to their use was shut off every night from the main building by the detective, and only the few on night duty had access to the guests' portion.

A watchman patrolled each corridor and hall, making the round every hour, and registering his rounds on the patent "telltale."

Speranza was delighted to see Robert, and even forgot her own troubles, for during the night she had suffered so intensely with toothache that she had been compelled to send for a dentist.

The night porter had gone on the errand, and Dr. Jasper, the dentist, had followed quickly in his footsteps to render what relief he could to the suffering guest.

It was in the midst of the confusion that Robert returned home, and he congratulated himself that he had been absent, for no one could accuse him of being a participant in the theft.

Speranza was deeply excited, and was suffering from hysteria.

Jeanne kept rubbing her hands, and in broken English deploring that she ever left New Orleans. The New Yorkers were robbers, she declared, and nothing would make her believe her life was safe.

Robert knew not what to do. It was no business of his, and yet he felt that it did concern him and his employer in some way.

He wished himself out of the whole trouble, and really thought he would leave Speranza's employ, even if he had to go back to the theatre as usher.

Descending the elevator, he saw something sparkle and glitter on a little ledge by the landing.

He called the detective's attention to it, and on reaching it they

found it was one of the stolen jewels, a ring set with a large opal surrounded by small diamonds.

It was evident that the thief had descended by the elevator, and lost the jewel on his way.

That was only a slight clew, but it was all that they could obtain, and again the whole affair was wrapped in mystery.

Brendan had consulted Mr. Graham as to his future course.

"Does Speranza intend going to Europe?" asked Graham.

"Sometimes she says so, and at others not. I fancy she does not know her own mind."

"That is the very thing. If I were able to control her I should send her to some retreat——"

"You don't think, sir, that——"

"She is insane? No, but I believe her mind is unbalanced. But let us talk of your affairs. What is your ambition?"

"My ambition, sir?"

"Yes; if you had your own way, what career would you pursue?"

"I would like to have been a lawyer."

"I thought so. If you will read up the necessary books, and at the end of three months feel in the same way, I will give you a chance, and you may be chief justice of the United States yet."

"How can I thank you?"

"By patient study and perseverance. I have a nephew who is a lawyer in fairly good standing. He wants a New York opening, and is coming on here. I would like to place you with him. You will have to work hard."

"That I will, sir, and you shall never be ashamed of me."

"I don't think I shall. I already anticipate what you would say, and have secured the necessary books. They are dry reading, but——"

"They will be more fascinating than fiction to me, Mr. Graham."

After leaving Mr. Graham, Robert went to see Vernon Vane, and to inquire after little Eloise.

He was heartily welcomed, and the Vanes declared him to be the greatest hero they had ever known.

Mrs. Vane was deeply moved with emotion as she recalled how twice her little one had been saved from death by Brendan.

"Do you not know your parents? Have you no recollection of them?" she asked.

"None; and yet at times I seem to feel that I once had a mother who leaned over me and kissed me when I was in bed at night."

"My elder sister was here the other day, and she saw your portrait—that miserable little tintype you had taken at the Glenada."

"I will have a better one taken."

"So you must."

"I will go to-morrow."

"Thanks! Eloise will be as much pleased as I shall be."

"Then, for dear Eloise, I shall certainly have the portrait taken."

"My sister—she is a widow, you know—wishes to know you. She says you remind her so much of her husband."

"Indeed! What do you think?"

"I never knew her husband. I was South when she married. I was at a school in Georgia, and she went with her husband to California. But Marie was fairly stunned when she saw your portrait."

Robert had not forgotten his new fad of palmistry, and before he left the house he had secured impressions of the hands of the Vanes and little Eloise.

"You will be reading our fortunes next."

"No, Mrs. Vane; but I do believe certain characteristics are shown by the lines of the hand."

"Yes, there was that Russian—I forget his name—who looked at my hand," said Vernon Vane, "and he told me many things which were quite true. What does the baroness think?"

"I have not asked her."

"Why not?"

"That is more than I can say, but I will when I return."

Mrs. Vane had left the room, but returned just in time to hear the last sentence.

"You need not wait, for she is here."

Speranza had taken a great fancy to Mrs. Vane, and often called on her.

That lady laughingly acquiesced to Robert's desire to have the impression of her hand.

Brendan held the paper up to the light.

His hand trembled, his knees shook, and he could scarcely stand.

"Are you not well?"

"No, I—I——"

"Water, Vernon; Robert is fainting! Poor fellow! the strain of the last week has been too much for him!"

But it was not nervous exhaustion which caused Robert's fainting spell.

He had recognized the same lines on the paper as he had seen on the pillow-slip.

Speranza's thumb was marked exactly as was that of the suspected thief!

CHAPTER XXIII.

HIS FIRST CLIENT.

The discovery of the identity of the thumb mark was such a shock to Robert's nerves that it was a wonder he did not suffer more intensely.

He had looked upon Speranza as an ideal woman.

Yet, if his theory was right, she must have left her impress on the pillow-slip.

If so, what brought her into that particular room, and how came it that she should handle that pillow?

But after he had left the Vanes, after he had sought the solitude of his room, his mind became more active than ever, and his belief in the theory of palmistry was not shaken.

In the phantasms of the night he saw her clad in the ungainly garb of a convict, and knew that her lily-white fingers were hardened with work.

Then he awoke, and his waking moments were even more troublesome than his dreams.

Even if she were guilty, what business was it of his?

A new phase presented itself to his mind as the sunlight shone into the room.

What evidence had he against her? Could he go to the police and say: "Speranza stole the diamonds; I know it, because the lines of her thumb are the same as those on the pillow-slip?"

Would he not be laughed at?

Again, the words of the superintendent of police recurred to him, and he remembered that the officer had told him the pillow-slip and marked paper were no evidence, for he could not prove how or where he had obtained them.

He was glad.

The sunshine was reflected on his face, and a ray of gladness was in his heart.

But he must leave Speranza.

If he stayed in her employ he would be miserable, for doubts would always be rising in his mind.

The offer made by Mr. Graham was just the thing. It gave him an excuse for leaving.

When he learned that Speranza was indisposed, and that his services would not be needed until afternoon, he determined to see Thomas Graham that morning.

Graham gave him a hearty welcome, and declared he was just about to send for him.

"I want you to leave the baroness as early as you can," he said.

"Have you any particular reason, sir?"

"Yes. I have made up my mind you are going to be a great lawyer, and perhaps a judge, and the sooner you start the better."

Is it not strange that human nature delights in being contrary?

An hour before Robert had wished for an excuse to leave his duties as secretary, and now that the chance was offered him, he began to make all sorts of objections.

"My nephew wants some one at once——"

"I thought——"

"Yes, yes, I know all you were about to say, but I have new ideas. My nephew has entered into a partnership with Groter & Nicholls, and he wants a secretary. I have decided the place will suit you. The duties will be light, the salary good, and you can study law better and quicker in the office than you could at home. Will you accept?"

"You overwhelm me with kindness."

"Not at all. Make up your mind to rise to the head of your profession, and I shall be pleased to have helped you."

"I will do so, sir."

"You have the capability, Brendan; all you want is perseverance, and I think you have that also."

"You shall never regret assisting me, sir."

"I know it. Now I want you to go and see Mrs. Vane; her sister is a client of the new firm, and you can commence right away."

"But that would not be right!"

"You will get through by lunch time, and then you can return to Speranza and give her notice of your intention to leave."

"I will go at once."

"Stay; I will go with you. I am quite interested."

A carriage was called, and soon Mr. Graham and Brendan entered Vane's house.

Vernon was at home, and gave the young secretary a hearty welcome.

Eloise climbed on his knees and bestowed a number of kisses on his face.

Marie Ellsworth was much older than her sister, and was very unlike her in appearance.

Robert looked into the sweet, sad face of the widow, and was fascinated.

"I have wanted to meet you," she said, "for your portrait reminded me of one long since dead."

"And do I?"

"No. There is a difference."

Mrs. Ellsworth sighed as she acknowledged the difference, but Robert was rather pleased, for he feared a resemblance would have been painful to her.

"I must tell you my story," she said, "for you may be able to help me."

"It will be a pleasant duty."

"I am quite sure of it, you seem so very sympathetic."

"I will do all I can, both for you and for my employers."

"After I was married I went with my husband to California. He was interested in some mines there. We enjoyed the balmy climate, and were very happy for four years."

"From that time life lost much of its charm. My husband was kind and loving. Never did he use a cross word to me, and I had everything to make me happy, but he heard of a new vein of gold which had been found near San Vincento, in Southern California."

"The prospectors reported it to be so rich that fortunes could be made in a very brief period."

"My husband joined a company of miners, and left me, to inspect the gold field."

"So I was left alone; no, not quite alone, for I had a little baby only two months old, and it was for my baby boy's sake that I stayed in California, instead of going with my husband."

"I feel it is necessary to tell you all, because I want you to make a *précis*—I think that is what you lawyers call it—of the case."

Robert's face flushed at being called a lawyer. It was a proud moment to him, yet he did not wish to be misunderstood.

"I am not a lawyer—yet," he said, softly.

"I understand; but as you are going to be, I want to be your first client."

Again a flush of pleasure rose to Brendan's cheeks. It was gratifying to be spoken to in that manner, and he was proud to find the sweet, gray-haired lady had such confidence in him.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MARIE ELLSWORTH'S STORY.

"If I tell you my whole story you will be able to winnow it, retaining the grain and scattering the chaff."

Vernon Vane entered the room in his usual impulsive manner.

"Brendan, you will stay and lunch with us?"

"I think, Mr. Vane, I ought to return to——"

"The baroness?"

"Yes."

"I will telephone her and say you are here."

"But——"

"Of course, your duties; I understand, but she will excuse you. Strange that you should faint last night; you have been overtaxing your strength. By the way, have you got an impress of Marie's hand?"

Vane was always vivacious, never dull, at all times spoke as though he was in a hurry, and that the whole creation was of secondary moment when he was talking.

When he left the room Mrs. Ellsworth continued:

"My husband went to San Vincento, and wrote me that the ore was richer even than had been represented. He was sure that

an immense fortune would be made by each member of the company.

"A year passed, and my baby boy was growing rapidly. I wanted his father to see him. I wrote asking to be allowed to go to San Vincento, but the answer came that the climate was not so healthy and that it would be better if I stayed where I was."

"I knew that it cost him an effort to write such a letter, but it was for the best, as he thought."

"Six months more passed, and one day I was surprised to see him walk up to the door. The shock was almost too much for me, but joy seldom kills, and soon I got over my crying and laughing, for I was hysterical, and was happy once more."

"He told us such tales of the land he had just come from, and the stories of the gold the mines were producing seemed like the fairy stories of the 'Arabian Nights.'"

"In another year, he told me, he would be worth a million, at the very least; and then we built such charming castles in the air! We would travel, our baby boy should see the world, his earliest education should be gained in the countries he would afterward read about."

"I wanted to go to San Vincento, and my husband said he had another surprise in store. He was building a little cottage for me, on the side of one of the mountains, and in three months I was to go there, and we should not part again."

"In about ten weeks I started. It was a long journey to take without a male protector, but I had no fear. The welcome when I got there compensated for the miseries and inconveniences of the journey."

"For six months we lived an ideal life, and my little boy grew most charming."

"There was one of the company of miners, a young, dashing-looking man, whom I did not like. He was fond of wine, gambled—but, then, everybody did in those days—and jested about sacred things."

"He was often with my husband, and once told him of a new lode which was unknown to any one but himself. He wanted us to join in purchasing a concession from the Mexican Government which would give a monopoly of the hills to the purchasers."

"My husband agreed to take a half share, and Señor Gonzales started on his journey to the City of Mexico."

"A few months later and I knew my prejudice against him was well founded. Now I come to the time when certain events took place which are the cause of my seeking the aid of your firm."

"My husband went to San Jacinto, the place he had agreed to jointly purchase with Gonzales, and while there was killed."

"Killed!"

"Yes, poisoned. I know the doctors said he died from fever, but the fever was caused by poison."

"I hurried to see him, and took a private mountain wagon to cross the hills."

"We had reached a turn in the circuitous road, and saw that we were on the brink of a deep canyon."

"To look down made me dizzy."

"One of the horses became frightened and began to plunge."

"Jump out!" shouted the driver, and I did so, clinging tightly to my baby, for he was still a baby to me, though over two years old."

"I fell, and they say my head struck a stone. I was rendered senseless."

"When I recovered I was lying in a miner's log cabin. I asked for my boy, and the rough miner broke the news to me, as gently as he could, that my boy had fallen down the canyon, and, of course, was killed by the fall."

"No one had ever been through the gorge, which was reputed to be a thousand feet deep."

"They had still more sad news for me. My husband was dead and buried."

"For weeks I was like a maniac, and even forgot my name."

"When at last I was able to attend to business, I found that all the South California property had been given, by deed, to Gonzales, as security for a loan made to my husband, of which I knew nothing."

"The lawyers advised me that the deed was legal, and I had to return to the States poorer than when I left."

"The California property produced a good income, and that, fortunately, was still mine."

"Nearly seventeen years have passed since I left California to go to San Vincento, and over fourteen since my husband's death."

Mrs. Ellsworth paused.

Robert asked in what way she wished the lawyers to help her.

A bright light came into her eyes.

She was ready for a good fight.

"I have seen Gonzales——"

"Well?"

"He is in New York."

"And you want to try and recover the Mexican property?"

"My dear young sir, a year ago I heard that one of the accomplices of Gonzales was dying. He made a confession to the doctor who attended him. My husband never signed the deed possessed by Gonzales. Nay, more, the man confessed that the horses were frightened purposely when I crossed the mountain, in the hopes that I should be killed, as my husband had been. One other thing was said—my boy was not killed. He only fell a little distance down the gorge, and was rescued, but the dying man said he died a year later. I want to punish Gonzales and to find my child's grave. That is all I live for. Will you help me?"

All Robert's sympathetic nature was aroused.

He would help Marie Ellsworth, and all sorts of ways of doing so flashed through his mind.

His meditations were interrupted by the entrance of Vernon Vane.

"It is all right, Brendan; you are to stay to lunch. I have telephoned the lady, and she has a headache, so you can stay all day. Graham is coming also to dinner."

Robert thanked Mr. Vane for his invitation, and returned to his writing, for he had commenced making a *precis* of the story narrated by Mrs. Ellsworth.

"You saw Gonzales?" he asked.

"Yes."

"When was that?"

"Let me think a moment. Yes, I remember the day well; it was the very day you rescued Eloise on Fifth Avenue. I was in the park. I saw Gonzales, and my first impulse was to make myself known to him, but at that moment a carriage stopped, and its occupant—a lady—invited him to enter, and they drove away together."

"What age man?"

"He must be over fifty, but he has kept his age so well that he does not look more than forty, at the outside."

"You are sure it was Gonzales?"

"Quite. The first thing which attracted my attention was his *boutonniere*."

"Why?"

"Because in the olden days we used to say that the world would come to an end if ever Gonzales forgot to wear a red rose."

Robert started.

He wondered why a red rose should so startle him, yet it was singular that Speranza should always wear one, and now there was this stranger.

"A red rose?" he repeated.

"Yes; of course he could not always get a fresh one, so at times he wore an artificial rose, but it was always red."

"Had he one in his coat when you saw him in the park?"

"Yes; and the lady also wore one."

All came back to Robert. The anonymous letter, the ride through the park, the League of the Red Rose, all tended to confirm him in the belief that Speranza was, after all, engaged in a criminal career.

CHAPTER XXV.

CONFESSION I

Robert had no heart to continue his duties as Speranza's secretary, and yet, when he returned to the hotel and saw her, all doubts were removed, for he could not believe that she was guilty.

"Robert, I am sick of life," she said, when he asked her, the day following that on which he had listened to Marie Ellsworth's story, how her health was.

"You have everything to make life happy," he replied.

"Yes; but I am a slave, bound in fetters which I cannot break."

"Will you pardon my seeming impertinence if I ask a question?"

"Ask what you like, Robert; I feel you are the only true friend I have."

"Do you mind telling me the name of the man you rode with in the park that memorable day?"

"You ask that?"

"Yes; was he Señor Gonzales?"

"I never heard him called by that name."

"But he was recognized by a person, and that person declares him to be a Mexican or South Californian adventurer."

"Indeed!"

Speranza spoke very haughtily, and the pity for her nearly died out in Robert's heart.

"Yes, and a warrant is about to be obtained for his arrest."

"What for?"

"Some crooked transactions out West."

"Oh! Will he get a long term?"

"For life, I should think."

"I am so glad; he deserves it—what am I saying? I mean if he is guilty."

"He is guilty, but he may be tried here first."

"What for?"

The ghastliness of Speranza's face almost frightened Robert, but he fired a random shot, watching her closely as he spoke:

"He is suspected of being implicated in the diamond robbery."

Speranza sighed, but her face betokened no guilt.

"Do you believe in hypnotism?" she asked.

Robert's reading had not been so very extensive, and he was justified in asking what hypnotism was.

"It used to be called mesmerism, because a Dr. Mesmer was the first to prove its existence. It is really the possession by one mind of power over another."

"I only know," answered Robert, gallantly, "that when I am in your presence your mind influences mine."

"That is not what I mean. Do you think I could influence you to do wrong if I were a hundred miles away?"

"No."

"But some say they have the power."

"It is foolish."

"Nay, nay, Robert, do not condemn as foolish what you do not fully understand. Now, take these diamond robberies——"

Robert arose from his chair and looked out of the window, for he felt he dare not let Speranza see his face while she spoke of the robberies.

"Yes, what of them?" he asked, with assumed calmness.

"The night when they take place I always dream about stealing jewelry."

Robert was startled.

"You do not speak."

"What can I say?" he asked.

"Robert, tell me, you do not think I steal the diamonds?"

There were tears in her eyes.

He did not answer her.

"Speak, I command you."

His heart seemed to rise in his throat; he had difficulty in uttering a word.

She saw his hesitation, and, with a strength of will new to her, she drew him toward her.

"Look me in the face and tell me all you think."

"I cannot."

"You must."

"Why should I?"

"Save me, save me; I am most miserable. Do not let Jeanne hear——"

"Hear what?"

"That you think me guilty."

"Madam, you know not what you are saying. Why should I think you guilty?"

"My cousin——"

"Is Jane Mason, of New Orleans, really your cousin?"

"How did you—I mean, to whom do you refer?"

"To Mademoiselle Fonblanque, alias Jane Mason——"

"You have found out her name; I will tell you——"

"You need not."

"Yes, I will; I want you to save me from myself. Jane's father was an American, Thomas Mason; her mother was Elvira Fonblanque. When she came to live with me, as she was so good a French scholar, I advised her to take her mother's name."

"Is she your cousin?"

"Why do you ask?"

"I want to know."

"She is a distant relation."

"Do you think she steals the diamonds?"

"No."

"Then do you?"

"Robert Brendan, how dare you ask me such a question?"

"You said I was to speak plainly."

"Heaven have mercy on me if you doubt me."

The woman seemed cast down and humiliated, but in a moment she had cast aside all her nervousness, and in cold, haughty tones bade Brendan never to speak again to her on such a subject.

"I wish to ask you to find another secretary——"

"Forgive me. I did not mean to be offended by you, or to offend you. See, I ask your pardon."

Robert told her of the opening he had, and how it would be to his great benefit.

"I shall be sorry to lose you," she said, quietly, "but it is for the best, and yet I believed you could save me."

"Save you?"

"Yes. Robert, bear with me. At times I am led to do things which I know are wrong and are against my judgment, but I am hypnotized."

"Do you really believe it?"

"I am sure of it."

"Who by?"

"I think Señor——"

"Gonzales?"

"No, Graganza."

"The brigand?"

"Yes."

"Was it Graganza who was with you in the park?"

"Yes."

"He is half brother to Espartero?"

"Yes."

"And you have——"

"Bound myself to them; the red rose is the symbol."

"And you have stolen——"

"No. To my knowledge, I have never done that, but I have dreamed I have done it."

"Madam, you have confessed your guilt. I know that you were in one room at the Glenada where a robbery was committed."

"Yes, my own."

"No, in another."

"How do you know it?"

"Your hand was black with coal dust, and as you lifted up the pillow to take the jewels you left the impress of your thumb on the pillow-slip."

"How do you know?"

"I have the piece in my pocket."

"Robert, I am innocent. I have wealth greater than you have any idea of. Why should I take a few jewels? If I have done as you say, I have acted unconsciously. Save me, for I am in your power."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE SECRET REVEALED.

Some of our readers may remember hearing of the great sensation caused by the offer of fifty thousand dollars reward by a leading firm of jewelers for the return of a quantity of diamonds and other stones.

The advertisement promised that no questions should be asked and no criminal proceedings taken against the guilty parties.

The police professed to be very indignant, because, they said, they were on the track of the criminals and would soon have them securely behind the bars of the Tombs.

Certain moralists took the high ground that it was wrong to compound a felony, and that to do so was as bad as being allied with the thieves.

The advertisement appeared three times, and then no more was heard either of the jewels or the reward.

The jewelers absolutely refused to answer any questions, and the police declared that they had nothing to do with the reward in any way.

People wondered whether the jewels were recovered or hopelessly lost.

Their curiosity was never gratified, but we can take them behind the scenes and reveal the whole secret.

On the day after Speranza had made the appeal to Brendan to save her, Jeanne Fonblanque was crossing Broadway, and was knocked down by some runaway horses.

She had just consciousness enough left to give Speranza's address, and, as it was nearby, she was carried there.

The best physicians were at once summoned, and several consultations took place.

The result of their diagnosis and discussions was that Jeanne was injured so much internally that she could not live more than twenty-four hours.

Speranza was deeply affected, for she had learned to love the girl who had been so long her companion.

Jeanne declared it was better that she should die, but, before she was ready to meet her Maker, she must make a confession.

Briefly she told her story to her friend and relative, and Speranza was nearly heart-broken.

"You must tell your story in full," she said; "the time has come when it is necessary."

Jeanne agreed to do so, and a special messenger was sent to summon Thomas Graham and Vernon Vane.

These two, with Speranza and Robert, were to hear the story and decide on future action.

Years before the opening of our story, and two years before Speranza met with the adventure in Mexico, Jane Mason linked her fortunes with as bold a lot of outlaws as ever robbed their fellowmen.

Jane had fallen into their power, and, to save herself, had sold her soul to them.

It was through their secret work that Speranza took Jane into her employ as companion and maid.

Speranza was of a very susceptible nature, and easily influenced.

All her life she had suffered from somnambulism, and, while in that condition, the stronger mind of Jane was able to influence her.

Graganza, or Gonzales, for the identity was the same, possessed strong mesmeric or hypnotic power, and had so far impressed Speranza's mind as to make her believe she must do just as he bade her.

The rest was easy.

Every day Jane would in some way introduce the red rose, and, while professing to laugh at the mysterious influence, would strengthen Speranza's belief in the power of the bandits, should she ever disobey their orders.

Information would reach Jeanne that certain people staying in the hotels where the wealthy baroness was sojourning possessed great wealth in jewels.

After, by such means as were within her reach, satisfying herself that the report was a true one, Jane, by a mysterious perfume, strongly impregnated with an anæsthetic, would cause her relative to sleep, and, in her sleep, enter the rooms and abstract the jewels.

It was the stronger mind of Jeanne acting on the more susceptible one of Speranza.

It was an evidence that what Hamilton in the United States, and Charcot in Europe declared could be done, was really done by that mysterious power which Reichenbach called odyle force, and which more modern scientists termed hypnotism.

No suspicion was attached to Speranza, because of her wealth, while Jane always kept in the background.

The occasional robbery of Speranza was necessary to ward off any possible suspicion.

The disposal of the jewels was easy, for some one was always at hand to receive them.

In the last case it was the *pseudo* dentist, Dr. Jasper.

Jane knew all the members of the League of the Red Rose, and timed the robberies so that some one should be at hand to receive the jewels before suspicion was aroused.

The very respectability of the parties made the accomplishment of the robberies an easy matter.

In no case was any one engaged who was known to the local police.

Jane made the fullest confession, and those who listened to her did not doubt that she had spoken the truth.

There was, however, a phase of the question which the sharp mind of Thomas Graham grasped at once.

No one would believe the hypnotic story.

Speranza would have to bear the responsibility of the thefts,

and, as the confession stood, it was the baroness who was guilty of the actual robbery, while Jane and the others were accomplices after the fact.

Speranza had not spoken a word.

To those who watched her face during the confession it was clear that all was new to her.

She showed how horrified she was.

Her face gradually became white, her teeth were tightly set, her eyes almost blazed with anger.

She was a Southerner. In her veins ran the blood of fiery Spaniard, impulsive French and warm-blooded Louisianian.

She was trying to control her temper.

Robert saw the struggle, and drew his chair closer to hers.

He was only just in time, for, as Jane concluded her story, Speranza arose to her feet and raised her hand, in which there gleamed a tiny, silver-handled revolver. She leveled it at the woman lying on the bed; but before her finger could press the trigger Robert had wrenched it from her hand and forced her back into the chair.

The dying woman did not speak again for some time. She knew she deserved death at the hands of her befriender and relative, and with almost sublime courage she faced what she deemed to be the inevitable.

When she saw that Robert had taken the weapon away she sank back on her pillow.

"I dare not ask you to forgive me!" she gasped. "I made you do wrong. I have suffered; you must not."

Speranza's temper had cooled down, and when she saw how Jane was suffering she crossed to the bed.

"I forgive you," she said, slowly, but with evident earnestness.

"I die happy, but——"

Jane could not utter another word; the exertion had been too much, and as she sank back wearily all saw that death was stamped on her face.

It was necessary to take action at once, for Speranza might be suspected at any moment, and even some of her accomplices might give evidence against her as soon as they knew Jane was dead.

The League of the Red Rose must be broken up, and Speranza was not only willing but anxious to accomplish that end.

After thinking it well over, the friends thought Speranza should offer a big reward for the return of the jewels, and, as she had a list of them, it would be easy to know whether all were returned.

Mr. Graham personally waited on the parties who had been robbed during the previous year, and induced them to agree to pay their share of the reward should their jewels be recovered, he agreeing, for a mysterious client, to carry on the negotiations without any charge. The dentist, Dr. Jasper, the Mexican known as Graganza, and a French count, Zacharoff, were summoned by the secret sign of the red rose to meet Speranza.

All three answered the summons, and were, to their astonishment, met by Mr. Graham.

"Gentlemen," he began, courteously, "the importance of this meeting is scarcely to be overestimated. Your whole careers are known. A chapter of history is about to close, and you will have to assist."

The French count was indignant.

He really simulated anger well, but Mr. Graham was cool and very gentlemanly.

Ringing the bell, he bade Robert Brendan to enter.

"Mr. Brendan will read a list of jewels stolen during the past year. It is a matter easily proven that these jewels passed into your possession, and as you have never rendered an account of the money received for them, it is presumed you still have them."

"This is a plot!"

"A conspiracy!"

"We are insulted!"

Mr. Graham was in no hurry. When they had expressed their indignation in their own way, he calmly threw another bomb into their midst.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE PAYING OF THE REWARD.

"Your ally and friend, Jane Mason, better known as Jeanne Fonblanque, has made a full confession. You are trapped. But a reward has been offered for the jewels. Five thousand dollars will be paid to the one who discovered the clew to the thieves, and fifteen thousand dollars will be paid to each of you when the entire number of jewels are returned and you are on steamers bound for some foreign port."

Graganza laughed as though it were a good joke.

Dr. Jasper referred to his business reputation.

Count Zacharoff declared by all the crowned heads of Europe that he had never been so much insulted before. He even threatened that, France having been insulted through him, war would be declared, and only by blood could the insult be wiped out.

"Very well, gentlemen," Graham calmly remarked. "There is no compulsion, but we use a little gentle persuasion. I have a telephone connection with police headquarters, and—to put it mildly—you are wanted there. If you arrange with me, you leave the country as society people should; if you arrange with the police, you will go to Sing Sing and amuse yourselves with the lock-step for a few years. I do not think that would be so pleasant."

"What guarantee have we?"

"Ah, that is a reasonable question."

"It is necessary."

"Very."

"We ask you what guarantee we have?"

"You have my word."

"That is not enough."

"Very well, then; I will call up the police——"

"No, no, wait; perhaps we may make some arrangements."

Graganza smiled and rubbed his hands, as though his thoughts were very pleasant.

His whole demeanor was very unlike that of a man for whom the prison cell was waiting.

"I do not like to doubt the word of a gentleman like you, Mr. Thomas Graham, or of a waif like this"—pointing to Brendan—"who does not even know his own name; but perhaps you may not know that, even if we possessed the jewels, we did not—ahem!—steal them. That if we, any of us, liked to turn State's evidence, we could go free, while a well-known baroness would go to Sing Sing for a goodly number of years."

"Very well expressed, Señor Graganza," Graham answered; "but we have considered the question in all its bearings. Turn State evidence, and you would be locked up in the House of Detention until the trial, and afterward would have to leave the city penniless, whereas now you can go with fifteen thousand dollars."

"The jewels are worth four times that amount."

"Are they?"

"Yes. Why, those I possess I could sell for forty thousand dollars, while Jasper and Zacharoff have about as much more in value."

"But if you turned State's witness you would have to give up the jewels."

"Not much. You would have to prove we had them."

"That would be easy."

"Not so easy as you imagine; the word of Count Zacharoff would be of as great value as yours, Mr. Graham, while I should be believed in preference to Robert Brendan."

"You are right, señor; you will be believed, and you have already confessed to having forty thousand dollars' worth of jewels."

"But you are the only persons who have heard the confession."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; for no one outside could hear a word spoken."

"That is true."

"Then I have the best of it."

"We do not think so, Señor Graganza; every word you have uttered has been taken down——"

"Whom by?"

"That phonograph into which you have been speaking all the time."

Graganza saw that he was caught, for close to where Brendan was standing was a curtain, which only partially hid the funnel-shaped auriculum of the improved phonograph.

"Trapped!" hissed Graganza, as he saw how nicely he had been led to incriminate himself.

He made an attempt to destroy the phonograph, but Robert presented a loaded revolver in such close proximity to his face that he stepped back, and accepted the conditions offered by Graham without another objection.

To guard against possible escape, an officer, armed with a warrant, was sent with Graganza to fetch the jewels.

The same procedure was adopted with the others, and before night all the jewelry had been recovered.

At two o'clock next morning an outward-bound steamer conveyed two of the number to Europe; one had still to be detained.

"Señor Graganza, you will stay at the hotel to-night, and to-morrow arrangements shall be made for your return to Mexico."

With that the chief conspirator had to be satisfied.

But the Mexican did not sleep.

He was never alone, for Graham and Robert shared his room, and during the hours of the night told another story, strange, or perhaps even stranger, than fiction.

Robert had called him Gonzales, and a tremor had passed visibly over him.

Gradually Robert drew him on to speak of San Vicente, and then of Ellsworth.

"Who poisoned him?" Robert asked.

"That I know not; I meant to rob him of the mines, but I never stooped to murder."

"Then you do not know who did?"

"No, on my life, I do not."

"Ellsworth's widow has applied for a warrant for your arrest."

"Where is she?"

"In New York."

"Take me to her."

"Why?"

"I want to render her justice."

"How can you?"

"The mines are still hers."

"Are they?"

"Yes; I could not take possession, for the deed of gift had not been recorded, and my title was of no value without Ellsworth's signature, or that of his widow."

"But who is working the mines now?"

"No one, openly; the government is protecting them."

"Where was the child buried?"

"What child?"

"Ellsworth's."

"It did not die, as far as I know. My half-brother, Espartero, took it."

"How long ago?"

For some reason Graganza refused to answer any more questions, and would not utter another word.

Hopes and fears were in the heart of Robert.

Might he not be the son of Marie Ellsworth?

How strange it would be if such were the case!

Graganza, after a good breakfast in the morning, offered to make full restitution to Marie Ellsworth. But about the child he would not utter one word, and it was deemed advisable not to tell Marie that her child did not die, as she had believed.

The owners of the jewels were more than delighted with their recovery, and were loud in their praises of Thomas Graham.

Robert richly deserved the five thousand dollars for finding the clew to the robberies, though no one ever knew what the clew was.

Speranza was never suspected, and she broke loose from all those who had hypnotized her, and in company of friends, her mind grew stronger, and therefore, able to resist abnormal influences.

She insisted in paying half the reward, and, as she was very wealthy, she could well afford to do so.

She had aged rapidly through her trouble, but was of the same loving disposition, and Robert fairly idolized her.

Thomas Graham was urged to again practice law, but he said the last case was enough for him, and he would retire on his laurels.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE ROLLING BACK OF DARK CLOUDS.

A year has passed away since the mysterious recovery of the jewels in New York.

To the public the whole transaction was a mystery, and will remain one until this story is read.

At the Hotel Nationale, in the City of Mexico, the principal actors in the events narrated were gathered together.

Thomas Graham, fond of travel and adventure, had been in Mexico and Southern California for the best part of the year.

Brendan, to whose upper lip a dark mustache added a manly beauty, had been his companion.

For six months the party had been a large one, for Speranza, Marie Ellsworth, Mrs. Vane and little Eloise had joined the two gentlemen and enjoyed the beauties of the tropics together.

Robert had been intrusted by the firm of Groter & Nicholls with the important cases of Ellsworth vs. Señor Gonzales and Ellsworth vs. the Republic of Mexico.

It was not to be supposed, that Robert Brendan was able to conduct cases of such magnitude, but he was to travel with Thomas Graham, who had been, in his younger days, a most astute lawyer, and the work was mostly the collection of evidence.

It was a responsible position, and Robert was proud of the confidence reposed in him.

Affairs were reaching a climax, and the conference was called in order that the final report might be received from the agents employed.

Graganza had shown that he had will power enough to be honest, and during the year had worked faithfully in the interests of Marie Ellsworth, and Speranza was no longer afraid to meet him.

The red rose had no terrors for her, and its influence had been destroyed.

Graganza had found every obstacle thrown in his way by his

half-brother, Espartero, who was still the leading spirit of a gang of bandits and gypsies.

"Will the mystery ever be cleared up?" Marie Ellsworth asked, for the thousandth time since the party had entered the territory of the Mexican Republic.

She had searched for her child's grave, and no one had thought it well to tell her that the little one did not die.

It would have been horrible torture to her had she known that the child had been taken away by the bandit Espartero.

"Yes, Mrs. Ellsworth, all will be made clear in time," Robert answered.

"I know not what I should have done without you, Robert. You have been like a son. If I recover my possessions you must accept half."

"No, no; I have only done my duty."

"I shall insist. If I could but find that grave I should be happy."

"My dear Mrs. Ellsworth, I hope you may be happy soon."

Eloise had improved wonderfully during the year, and had grown into a tall, graceful little girl.

She thought Robert the most wonderful young man, and her dreams were always about him.

She had been out with her nurse, Mary, and ran into the room very excitedly.

"They are here! And papa, too."

Then she ran back into the street, and soon returned with Vernon Vane.

"Why, what brings you here? Never a word did you say about your coming," his wife exclaimed, after the first glad outburst of welcome.

"What brought me? The very fastest train I could secure. I had some thought of writing, but I managed to get here a few hours ahead of the mail, so I can see you as well as talk to you."

"You dear, good papa!"

"Yes, yes, Pussy, I suppose I am a dear, good papa, and if you will open that small valise you will find some New York candies."

The child did not wait to get the candies, but climbed on her father's knee and nearly strangled him in her excess of joy.

When she had the candies she left the room with Mary, and Vernon Vane told his news.

"Espartero is dead."

"Dead!"

"Yes, killed!"

"How?"

"You remember Adelbert—"

"Simkins?"

"The same. Well, the two, Espartero and Simkins, got into some snarl in a dive. Simkins pulled a knife, and his antagonist shot at him, but hit Espartero by mistake. I happened to hear of it. Espartero wanted to see Brendan. I went to see the wounded man, and found him dying; he took a package of papers from under his pillow, sent for sealing wax, and sealed it. He wrote your name on it, Brendan, and said you were to get it as early as possible. That is why I turned United States mail carrier or messenger boy. And here it is."

Robert took the package, and with trembling hand broke the seal.

The very first words caused him to give a cry of joy:

"I am not your father."

Speranza looked at Robert for an explanation, for he had never told her that the bandit chief had once claimed him as his son.

Robert read on, and handed the document to Thomas Graham.

"Read it, sir, and tell me, am I awake or dreaming?"

The confession made by Espartero can be briefly told.

Years ago he had a quarrel with his half-brother, Gonzales, or Graganza. He knew that his brother had secured a large mining property, and he found out the crooked means by which it was obtained.

He determined to spoil his brother's chances, and, hearing of the child which was supposed to be dead, he abducted it, took it to the States, and gave it to the care of a man named Brendan. His idea was that, when the boy grew up, he would buy from him his right to his dead father's property for a mere trifle, and then make terms with Gonzales.

But, after a year or so, the brothers became reconciled, though soon parted, for both served terms in prison for brigandage.

The boy was forgotten for a long time, and it was believed the Mexican Government had confiscated the mining property.

A few months before Robert ran away, and was saved from death by Thomas Graham; Espartero heard that the property was being held for Ellsworth's heirs, and that an advertisement had appeared in *La Nationale* for those heirs.

Espartero saw his opportunity, and secured the boy.

We know the subsequent events better than the bandit, so need not recapitulate them for our readers.

The package contained a tiny charm and a necklace of beads which Mrs. Ellsworth recognized as having been on her child when the accident occurred in the mountains.

Her heart told her that Robert was her child. From the very first she had experienced an affection for him which could not be accounted for by mere friendship.

Graganza had entered the room. He did not know the identity of Robert with the lost child, but he corroborated all the other parts of his brother's statement.

He had good news also, for the Mexican Government had recognized Marie Ellsworth's claims, and the mines were once more made over to Gonzales and Ellsworth by special concession.

The impulsive Mexican had transferred his interest to his partner's widow as a salve to his conscience.

He absolutely refused to keep his share; but a compromise was made by which he became the manager at a handsome salary.

Everything appeared roseate, and no one was more delighted than Speranza.

A few weeks later the party separated, Speranza going to Europe, where she intended staying a few years; Gonzales stayed in Southern California, to look after the mining interests, while the rest returned to New York, Robert Ellsworth to study law, and the others to watch his progress.

He has every chance of success, for he is fond of his profession and is determined to rise to the highest pinnacle of legal fame.

The mines proved richer than even Gonzales thought, and Marie Ellsworth will soon be a millionairess, a fact which gives more joy to her heart because it will all belong to Robert Brendan Ellsworth, who, through many trials and troubles, triumphed at last, and won the love and respect of all who knew him.

THE END.

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